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## **THE CRY OF DISTRESS**





# **THE CRY OF DISTRESS**

**BY**  
**K. SANTHANAM**

**A first-hand description and an  
objective study of The Indian  
Famine of 1943.**

**(with illustrations and  
Shankar's cartoons)**

**Rs. 2/-**  
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"IT IS A BRITISH AFFAIR," SAYS A  
U.S.A. LEND-LEASE OFFICIAL, ON  
INDIAN FAMINE



The Hindustan Times, 26-9-1943.

## THEN AND NOW

*The following is an extract from "Prosperous India," By William Digby, published in 1901:—*

- There are no stores of grain in the villages ;
- the property represented by gold and silver (and pewter) ornaments is greatly depleted, has almost disappeared :
- the ancient occupations of the people on sea and land have been destroyed, and more and more of men and women are driven to the soil without capital wherewith to properly cultivate it ;
- the ships which now carry its coastwise trade are steamers built in Britain, the officers are Britons, the profits derivable from the trade go to Britain ;
- the hillsides, joyous with the richly-blossomed tea and coffee bushes, the plains radiant at harvest-time with the indigo and jute plants, are cultivated with foreign capital and the profits arising therefrom go out of India, while all the managers are foreigners ;
- every profession and every mercantile enterprise which spell profit are, in their higher and more largely paid positions, exploited by foreigners to the detriment of the natives of the country.

All this is likewise true of the personnel of the Administration in each of its higher branches, where, above everything else, such a state of things ought not to have been conceivable even in a modified or remote degree.

This is why famine approximates more and more towards becoming a representation of the normal condition of many parts of India. As regards the future, it is no more certain that tomorrow's sun will rise on its annual course and perform its diurnal journey than it is that the sufferings of the Indian people will—a vast change denied—year by year become greatly increased. Even now those sufferings cry to Heaven for amelioration, and cry vainly, for the Eye which erstwhile saw the sparrow fall, and the Ear which heard the faintest cry, appear to be both closed for ever. Saddest of all, in any back-

ward glance over British-Indian history, is the thought that the very opposite to what is now experienced was, if we cared to adopt, before us as a certain achievement. This I have shown by citations from early documents in a previous chapter. Had the wiser policy been adopted, Britain would have built, for Britons to rejoice over, an edifice of imperishable renown based on the greater prosperity of the Indian people; England's trade with India would have been vastly bigger than it now is and have become a token of imperial prosperity instead of, as now, a sign of approaching death. The two policies have always been before us. As if under an almost demoniac possession, every time the choice has been ours, we have chosen the wrong. Under the East India Company the renewal of the Charter gave us the choice once every twenty years; today Parliament gives us the opportunity every year, but if India be mentioned, it is true of our legislators that "they all with one consent begin to make excuse," they troop out of the legislative chamber, and India remains unredeemed. That is one reason why famine is today chronic in India.

Do any of us, I wonder, realize what the great nations of the world are thinking and saying of our administration in connection with these many dreadful famines? Depend upon it, they see the consequences which we will not allow ourselves to see and concerning which we comfort ourselves by describing what we do see by other and inoffensive appellations. I have seldom, as a Briton, felt more humiliated than I did in January 1900, when I happened to be in Paris. *Le Matin*, one of the most trustworthy of Parisian journals, one day contained a long article descriptive of the sufferings of the famine-stricken Indian people, and deprecatory of British rule. Knowing I had lived in India, the President of the British Chamber of Commerce in Paris came to me, as he said, so that I should supply him with material whereby he could demolish such horrible slanders on the British name as were contained in the article in question. I replied that I should only be too happy to do what he wanted. I read the article carefully. When I got to the end of it, I found I could not contradict or disprove a single statement it contained. There were some alleged incidents as to which I could say nothing, as I had no information concerning them, except that they were not improbable. The main story was unassailable, the deductions not unreasonable. The story was not complimentary, the deductions

were not flattering, either to our self-esteem or to our humanity as the rulers of India.

The like thing happened in the United States. When Lord Curzon, in 1900, carried a begging bowl among the nations beseeching subscriptions for the famine-stricken, the question was asked : "Why should America give?" It was urged that India's millions were starving because of England's neglect of duty to India.

Is it too late to bring India back to prosperity? More often than not, in pondering over the situation, I think it is too late. Only by a change in the mind and attitude of the English people, requiring a great miracle to bring it about, is it possible to cherish even a hope for better things, for a brighter outlook. In the best of circumstances, which is that the British people, on being instructed as to the real facts of the case, should put their whole heart and strength into an effort for reform—the task will be tremendously difficult. But will the instruction be given? Where are the instructors? Who amongst us have eyes to see, ears to hear? If we would but see, did we dare to let ourselves hear, what India from nearly all her hundreds of districts is showing to us, is saying to us, only one thing could happen : we should be so worked upon as to determine, God helping us, that this one thing we would do :

We would so change the conditions of our rule in India that the inhabitants of that distressful country should once again in their history have daily bread enough for comfortable sustenance, and that the whole realm of India once more should taste the sweets of prosperity.



## TWO YEARS AGO

*The following is from an article by Mahatma Gandhi entitled "Real War Effort" and which appeared in "Harijan" on January 25, 1942 :—*

The greatest need of the immediate present is to feed the hungry and clothe the naked. There is already scarcity in the land both of food and clothing. As the war progresses, both the scarcities must increase. There are no imports from outside, either of foodstuff or of cloth. The well-to-do may not feel the pinch as yet or at all, but the poor are feeling it now. The well-to-do live on the poor. There is no other way. What is then their duty? He who saves gains as much, that is to say, he produces as much. Hence those who feel for the poor, those who would be one with them must curtail their wants. There are many ways. I shall only mention some here. There is much, too much food eaten and wasted by the well-to-do.

Use one grain at a time. *Chapati*, rice and pulses, milk, ghee, *gur* and oil are used in ordinary households besides vegetables and fruit. I regard this as an unhealthy combination. Those who get animal protein in the shape of milk, cheese, eggs or meat need not use pulses at all. The poor people get only vegetable protein. If the well-to-do give up pulses and oils, they set free these two essentials for the poor who get neither animal protein nor animal fat. Then the grain eaten should not be sloppy. Half the quantity suffices when it is eaten dry and not dipped in any gravy. It is well to eat it with raw salads such as onion, carrot, radish, salad leaves, tomatoes. An ounce or two of salads serves the purpose of eight ounces of cooked vegetables. *Chapaties* or bread should not be eaten with milk. To begin with, one meal may be raw vegetables and *chapati* or bread, and the other cooked vegetables with milk or curds.

Sweet dishes should be eliminated altogether. Instead *gur* or sugar in small quantities may be taken with milk or bread or by itself.

Fresh fruit is good to eat, but only a little is necessary to give tone to the system. It is an expensive article, and an over-indulgence by the well-to-do has deprived the poor and the ailing of an article which they need much more than the well-to-do.

Any medical man who has studied the science of dietetics will certify that what I have suggested can do no harm to the body, on the contrary it must conduce to better health.

This is only one way of saving foodstuff. It is obvious. But by itself it cannot produce much visible effect.

Grain-dealers have to shed their greed and the habit of making as much profit as possible. They must be satisfied with as little as possible. They run the risk of being looted, if they do not gain the credit of being keepers of grain for the sake of the poor. They should be in touch with the people in their neighbourhood. Congressmen have to visit grain-dealers within their beat and give them the message of the time.

By far the most important part of the work consists in educating the villagers to keep what they have and to induce cultivation of fresh crops wherever water is available. This requires widespread and intelligent propaganda. It is not generally known that bananas, potatoes, beet root, yam and *suran*, and in a measure pumpkin are food crops easily grown. They can take the place of bread in time of need.

There is too scarcity of money. There may be grain available but no money to buy it with. There is no money because there is no employment. This has to be found. Spinning is the readiest and the handiest. But local needs may supply other sources of labour. Every available source has to be tapped so that there is no want of employment. Only the lazy ones need and must starve. Patient handling will induce even this class to shed their laziness.

The problem of cloth is much easier than feeding, if it is handled well and in time. The mills may not be relied on in these times. There is ample cotton to be had in India. It is a problem for cotton cultivators how to dispose of their stock. The outside market is closed to them. Our mills cannot absorb the whole of the crop. It can be utilized, if the nation takes to spinning not for wages but for the sake of clothing the naked. Of course those who need employment will spin for profit. This number must be limited. They need organizing. Much money will be needed for the purpose. But national spinning does not need so much organizing. Profit motive being eliminated and willingness being assumed, organization is reduced to simplest terms.

"SO LONG AS THERE IS ANYWHERE A  
"SURPLUS WHICH MIGHT HAVE BEEN SENT  
TO A DEFICIT AREA I CANNOT REST  
CONTENT" - FOOD MEMBER



*The Hindustan Times, 12-9-1943.*

## INTRODUCTION

For the future historian, the Indian Famine of 1943 will present many puzzling features. He will find that the famine had suddenly descended on Bengal and some parts of Orissa almost without notice. He will miss the usual premonitory signs. There was no widespread failure of crops. There was no alarm in the Press. There was no discussion about applying the Famine Code or starting test works. He would find that the famine broke on Bengal almost as the cyclone of October 1942, giving no time for thought or action and carrying away men, women and children without warning. He would discover with astonishment that thousands of destitutes had flocked to Calcutta before the public were aware of it and many had died in the villages before a single voice had been raised on their behalf. He would compare this phenomenon with the thoroughness with which the August disturbances of 1942 had been dealt with. He would wonder what the officials who were so alert and active the year before had been doing when the famine had been creeping like a panther to devour their wards. Where, he would ask, were the aeroplanes which had watched over riotous mobs and bombed them?

As yet, no particulars are available as to the number of deaths caused by the present famine or even as to the number who had become destitutes and had to be fed by public charity. But enough is known to warrant the conclusion that it is comparable to the famines of 1770, 1877-8, 1896-7 and 1899-1900. It may therefore be useful to give some idea of these disastrous famines.

No statistical details are available about the famine of 1770 beyond the estimate of Warren Hastings that it swept away "at least one-third of the inhabitants". But some graphic descriptions are available. The following description by Bankim Chandra Chatterji may be compared with the accounts of the present famine given in the following pages:—

"In the Bengalee Year 1174 the crop had not been satisfactory; on that account rice became dear next year. People began to suffer. But the officials realized the rent to the last pie. After paying their rent in full, the impecunious among them began to be satisfied with a single meal a day. In the Bengalee year 1175, the rains were unsatisfactory. The people hoped that the Gods were going to rain down their blessings. Suddenly in autumn they became unkind. During autumn months not a drop of rain quenched the thirst of the parched earth; the fields of rice looked like fields of dried straw. The little crop that was harvested was purchased by the officials for the soldiers. People began to starve. At first, they began to have one meal a day, then it came to half a meal a day and then they began to starve. What could be harvested in the spring was wholly inadequate to meet the requirements of the people. Mohamed Reza

---

\* Extract from "The Famine of 1770" by Hemendra Prasad Ghose.

Khan, the Minister of Finance, in his eagerness to curry favour with his masters enhanced the revenue by 10 per cent. The firmament resounded the wailings.

"People first began to beg. Then who could give alms? The people began to starve. Then they began to fall victims to diseases. They sold their cattle; they sold their implements of agriculture; they devoured their seed-grain; they sold their houses and land. They began to sell their daughters, next sons and after that wives. Then who would buy girls, boys or women? Every one wanted to sell and no one to purchase. For want of food they ate the leaves of trees and the grass of the fields as also weeds. Members of the nomadic tribes and those belonging to the lower strata of society began to eat rats and cats. Many helpless people left their villages. Those who left died of starvation in strange places; and those who did not do so died of disease and as the result of taking unwholesome food.

"Pestilence broke out, fever, cholera and small-pox began to roam rampant—small-pox being the most prevalent. In every house people began to succumb. Who would tend the sick and touch them? No one was attended to, no one was looked after, and no one removed the corpse. Beautiful men and women died in the houses and their bodies were left to rot. On the appearance of the fell disease, the inhabitants left the sick and fled for safety."

The following quotation from Abbe Raynal\* is no less terrible and it will incidentally answer the question which has been repeatedly put to me how millions of people reduced to despair could calmly submit to suffering and death without any form of violent protest. This patience, for good or evil, has been the Indian tradition.

"The unhappy Indians were every day perishing by thousands under this want of sustenance, without any means of help and without any resources. . . . They were to be seen in their villages, along the public ways, in the midst of our European colonies—pale, meagre, fainting, emaciated, consumed by famine; some stretched on the ground in expectation of dying, others scarce able to drag themselves on to seek any nutriment and throwing themselves at the feet of the Europeans, entreating them to make them their slaves. To this description, which makes humanity shudder, let us add other objects equally shocking; let imagination enlarge upon them. If possible, let us represent to ourselves infants deserted, some expiring on the breast of their mothers; everywhere the dying and the dead mingled together; on all sides the groans of sorrow and the tears of despair; and we shall have some faint idea of the horrible spectacle Bengal presented for the space of six weeks.

"During this time the Ganges was covered with carcasses; the fields and highways were choked up with them; infectious vapours filled the air, and diseases multiplied. . . . It appears from calculations pretty generally acknowledged that the famine carried off a fourth-part, that is to say, about three millions.

"But it is still more remarkable, and serves to characterize the

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\* Extract from the "Amrita Bazar Patrika."

gentleness, or rather the indolence, as well moral as natural, that amidst this terrible distress, such a multitude of human creatures, pressed by the most urgent of all necessities, remained in an absolute inactivity, and made no attempt whatever for their self-preservation. All the Europeans, specially the English, were possessed of granaries, and these very granaries they respected. Private houses were so, too; no revolt, no massacre, not the least violence prevailed. The unhappy Indians, resigned to a quiet despair, confined themselves to the request of that succour that they did not obtain, and peaceably awaited the relief of death.

"Let us now represent to ourselves any part of Europe afflicted by a similar calamity. What disorder! what fury! what atrocious acts! what crimes would ensue! How should we have seen among us Europeans, some contending for their food with their daggers in hand, some pursuing, some flying, and without remorse massacring one another; How should we have seen men at last turn their rage on themselves, tearing and devouring their own limbs, and, in the blindness of despair, trampling under foot all authority, as well as every sentiment of nature and reason!"

We have more particulars about the other famines as two Famine Commissions were appointed to report upon them. In 1877, the famine affected an area of 200,000 square miles with a population of 36 millions. It was intense over 105,000 square miles with a population of 19 millions, and severe over 66,000 square miles with 11 millions. In Madras, 780,000 persons or 5 per cent of the population had to be publicly supported for 22 months and in Bombay 320,000 or 3½ per cent for 13 months. Mortality between 1876-78 was 5½ millions in excess of the normal rate. Relief operations cost 8 crores.

The famine of 1896-7 was even more widespread. It affected 225,000 square miles and 62 millions of people. At its peak, 5.3 per cent of the people of Bengal, 14.8 per cent of U.P., 12.9 per cent of Madras, 12.1 per cent of Bombay and 14.8 per cent of Punjab were affected. Over 800 million units of relief were given at a cost of Rs 17 crores.

The famine of 1899-1900 was of shorter duration and was less widespread than the one two years before but coming so soon after its mortality was very great, no less than ten millions being estimated to have died during those dreadful years.

It is not necessary to repeat what has been discussed in the coming pages but particular attention has to be drawn to one aspect of this famine. Members of the British Government have taken it as self-evident that they have no responsibility for it. They have gone further and contended that their agents in the Government of India are also largely free from responsibility because some powers have been transferred to Provincial Governments under the Government of India Act. It is rather strange that such an attitude can be taken at a time when the world is much more instructed about the true state of affairs than at any time before. Let us examine this contention.

Who was responsible for making India a belligerent in this war?

It may be recalled that Indian opinion was not even formally consulted and when the Congress protested against this injustice, it was claimed that under the present constitution war and peace were questions for the Imperial Government in Britain. Was it not elementary prudence that the authorities who declared war on behalf of India should have taken the same precautions as they did for assuring the food-supply of Britain? Did not the British Government accumulate large stocks, and keep ready a scheme of rationing even before war was actually declared? It may be said that Britain was dependent on external supplies for her food. But those who now lecture about the increase of Indian population and the slender margin on which millions of Indian people perpetually live should have known even then the risk involved in Japan's adherence to the Tripartite Pact and had plans ready for emergencies. But what was the actual case? The food of the Indian people never caused a moment's concern to their rulers in England or India till Burma was lost. Even then did they wake up? No. It took them a whole year to set up a Food Department and it needed this year's terrible famine to formulate a policy. Any impartial reader of the Report of the Foodgrains Policy Committee is bound to wonder why these elementary things were not done long before the war or at least as soon as the war began. It is elementary common-sense that price control is impossible without reserve of stocks. But the Government of India fixed the price of wheat but made no attempt to create a wheat reserve and had finally to abandon it. Should it require a committee to point out that a food production drive is meaningless without manures or cheap agricultural implements? What steps were taken to strengthen the transport system which is the life-line in an agricultural country like India liable to vicissitudes of famine? Again, who is responsible for the flood of paper money with which India has been paid for her invaluable men and materials supplied to the Allies? It is easy to understand the dilemma of the British Government. It refuses to part with power but it finds the responsibility irksome. Having taken India into the war, having put her political leaders in jail, having established authoritarian Governments in five provinces and puppet Ministries in four, it is not easily possible to evade the responsibility for the most elementary task of any Government—the feeding of the people. The coming months will show whether even at this late hour Britain will realize her responsibility and provide the shipping and other facilities for the import of the deficit and the minimum reserve indicated by the Foodgrains Policy Committee Report and procure the plant for the manufacture of chemical manures.

The object of this volume is not to give a connected and comprehensive account of the famine. The time for it is not yet. It is too early to say whether famine will be over by the end of 1943. Statistical details have been conspicuous by their absence from official sources. All that is attempted here is to bring together in a handy form the first-hand impressions of investigators who studied the famine on the spot. The first portion of this book contains the articles by the author published in the *Hindustan Times* in October and November. They are not

mere factual reports. A serious attempt has been made in them to deal with the problems created by the famine, the methods and difficulties in the way of non-official work in such circumstances and the manner in which Governments and peoples have reacted under similar conditions in various parts of the country. The first appendix contains the accounts of some distinguished eye-witnesses who toured Bengal and Orissa for the same purpose. In Appendix II, some statements and articles which are relevant to the subject-matter of the book have been brought together. Appendix III consists of extracts from the report of the correspondent of the *Hindustan Times* specially sent to Bengal in January 1944. The last and fourth Appendix consists of extracts from a Note supplied by the Government of India to the Central Legislature during the November session of 1943 and contains a summary of the recommendations of the Foodgrains Policy Committee which have been declared to be the basis of the policy finally adopted by the Government of India. It will assist the reader to compare Government action in the current year with the measures suggested by the Committee.



## THE BACKGROUND

### THE TRADITION OF INDIAN BUREAUCRACY

Nature has endowed India with a rich soil generously watered by rain and river. Providence has so far saved her from the disastrous effects of an enemy invasion. Yet the cry of hunger and distress is heard from Trivandrum to Chittagong. One feels angry and bitter at this inexplicable tragedy.

The Indian people naturally blame the Governments, Central and Provincial, for the disaster. In their turn, the officials lay the blame on the merchants who seem to have suddenly turned into hoarders and exploiters. The producers and merchants are not slow to ascribe all the distress to the innumerable orders and ordinances which they hardly understand, and certainly do not like, and through the labyrinths of which they could hope to grope their way only by resort to indiscriminate bribery.

At the request of the Managing Editor of the *Hindustan Times*, I have been visiting some of the areas where the distress is great. I wish to present to the readers an unvarnished picture of things I have seen and a truthful account of opinions I have heard. At the end I shall endeavour to put forth some constructive proposals which in my opinion are calculated to meet the present difficulties.

It is necessary, however, in order to understand the picture and appreciate the proposals to recall to the reader some objective factors which complicate the problem. Any solution which ignores them is not likely to be of any use.

The general economic condition of India may be described as medieval rural economy engaged in an unequal conflict with modern industrial and commercial civilization. If India were wholly based on rural subsistence economy, every small area would be self-sufficient for its food, clothing and other primary necessities and the population of the area would be limited by inexorable natural law to the local resources. If, on the other hand, India had attained her due place among the great industrial nations, her transport and social organization would have developed to the point where the entire national resources could be readily pooled and could be so distributed that no single part of the country would be forced to bear an exceptional strain. As a matter of fact, the economic development of the country has been going on in irregular patches. Many areas have taken to money crops and their population has increased far beyond the local resources of food. Their needs were met in normal times by the minimum possible transport and marketing systems. When these were subjected to the strain of a world war, it is no wonder they have broken down.

Another factor which has to be taken into account in understand-

ing and dealing with the present situation is the Indian bureaucratic tradition. The tradition of the Indian bureaucracy is that of a police state in which the main business of the official is to issue orders to those below him and to expect things to be done automatically. This method has been found sufficient to deal with political agitations and maintain order. When the food crisis appeared, the officials tried to deal with it in the same fashion and were confounded to see that the food stocks which were found in their statistics were either not existing or had mysteriously disappeared. At the meetings of the representatives of the States and Provinces, there was much talk of surplus and deficiency areas and generous allotments were made from the former to the latter. As will be seen in the coming articles, this allocation was not worth more than the paper on which it was noted. The truth is that all statistics with the Central and Provincial Governments are unreliable. They may be used for lecture purposes in colleges or for report purposes by administrations which do not require any high degree of accuracy. But when one has to operate on food stocks arrived at by a series of rough approximations, when the total error may amount easily to 10 per cent, one is out for trouble. The annual production of foodgrains in India is variously estimated from 50 to 60 million tons. The variation due to season is said to be of the order of 5 million tons and allowing for statistical error of the same order, the difference between estimate and fact may be anything up to 10 million tons. If it is further remembered that the bulk of these grains is consumed by millions of small-scale producers it will be realized that any estimate of the food actually available for marketing will be altogether useless for practical purposes. When the Indian officials seek to charm away the hunger of millions by issuing edicts based on these legendary figures, they cannot be surprised that the deaths on the streets of Calcutta should so simply refute their calculations. It is with great chagrin, I fancy, that the officials are realizing that the only foodstuff they can operate upon is that which they have obtained by purchase or requisitioning.

Finally, the political deadlock is casting its blight on this as on every other vital question. It matters little who was responsible for the deadlock. But no one can deny that the political deadlock has created a gulf between the people and the Government. Nor do we suppose that it will be questioned that intimate and continuous co-operation between the masses and the administrations is an essential condition for tiding over the present crisis and to avoid its repetition. Owing to the political deadlock a large number of popular leaders who have earned the confidence of the people by long service are interned or are undergoing sentences of imprisonment. Many of those who are outside are in a mood of bitter resentment and frustration. There is a general reluctance to organize public opinion on any matter and mutual suspicion is poisoning the feeble attempts made here and there for beneficial co-operation.

## II

### INCREDIBLE

#### HOMELESS DESTITUATES ON CALCUTTA PAVEMENTS

It is incredible. If I had not seen it face to face, I should not have believed it. I had read with due dismay the accounts sent by the news agencies about the dead bodies found in the streets of Calcutta. I had noted with satisfaction the ready response of the public all over India for funds. But I was not prepared for anything like what I saw. I do not know if I shall be able to bring before the mind of the reader even a faint picture of the plight of Calcutta, the greatest city of India. I shall try.

First of all the reader should not be obsessed by the reported death-roll in the hospitals of the city. The figures are no more than a fraction of the actual deaths in Calcutta and I am assured by everybody I meet that the total death-roll of Bengal in this famine must be colossal already and will run into millions in the next three months unless some miracle of organization saves them. In any case, we cannot help the dead and, indeed, they are the lucky ones. It is the living that should absorb our attention. Let the reader imagine groups of men, women and children of all ages, in all states of emaciation scattered all over the pavements of this premier city. They are to be seen in single families, in groups of ten, of hundreds and they swell into thousands near the relief centres during midday when they are given gruel once a day. They live and sleep on the pavements and they have been doing so for the last ten long weeks. One cannot move out of one's house without meeting these unfortunates who bear the forms of human beings but who are already fallen so low that it seems to be a satire to call them men and women. The women and children seem to preponderate and their ghostly shapes are the most terrible accusations that one can imagine of our country, people and government.

This is not, however, the worst side of the picture. It is the thought that everyone in this great city has got mentally accustomed to the existence and plight of lakhs of destitutes at their very doors that hurts most. The Government of Bengal, the Corporation of Calcutta, the armed forces, British and American, which are so neatly and nicely provided with every comfort and convenience, and the general body of the citizens of Calcutta seem to have reconciled themselves to the living famine in the streets. Otherwise, how is it possible that these unfortunates could not be provided with shelter till some way could be found to send them back to their villages? Suppose that some such disaster overtakes England and the poor stream into London. I shall be surprised if even Their Majesties do not vacate their Palace to shelter the homeless. Was it really so difficult to find shelter for these destitutes? How many buildings have been requisitioned for military purposes and are these more important than saving dying sons and daughters of the country? What was the difficulty of temporarily

lodging the refugees in the schools and colleges by closing down the classes, if necessary, for a month or two? I was told by one or two prominent persons that this idea had already been mooted and that difficulties had been raised regarding the provision of sanitary facilities. Presumably, it is considered more sanitary to convert the entire thoroughfare and pavement of Calcutta into a lavatory. Even though it is October, sun and rain seem to be as heartless to these refugees as their fellow men and women. Far be it from me to suggest that efforts by individuals, associations and even by authority have not been made to do something for the starving destitutes. But all efforts have been limited to providing one scanty meal of gruel. No shelter, no systematic inquiry wherefrom, why and how they came to Calcutta, no plan as yet to put them on their feet and send them away as at least semi-human beings to their villages. I am told that such ideas are still in the deliberative stage and may come to fruition some time or other. But each day of procrastination must mean not only indescribable suffering but unthinkable degradation to most of the refugees. It will also make the task of human reclamation more and more difficult.

Some, who are oppressed by these thoughts, seek to try to find consolation in the idea that most of the refugees are beggars or landless labourers. It is surprising that systematic attempts have not been made to classify them. Even if many are landless labourers they play a definite role in the economy of Bengal and there is widespread apprehension that without them the next *aman* harvest may not be fully harvested in time. But I gather that there is a fair percentage of smaller peasants whose little stocks had run out, and who could not buy or borrow the food for their families.

If it could be established that this disaster was a pure act of an angry God and that human efforts could not have prevented it, we may bow before the inevitable. But no one I have met so far has put in this plea. In fact, it is altogether unsustainable. It is a far cry from Trivandrum to Calcutta. When I was at the former place a fortnight ago, I was repeatedly told that Bengalis knew how to advertize themselves and to get what they wanted. I was asked—and not unjustifiably—how Bengal could be in a worse plight than Travancore which produces only a third of its rice requirements and during the pre-war years imported more rice than Bengal. How can a normally self-sufficient province like Bengal which has over 21 million acres of paddy lands watered by the Ganges and the Brahmaputra and produces nine million tons of rice per year, go suddenly bankrupt? Bengal may have to put up with three-quarters of her normal rations, but have not Travancore and Cochin gone on half or even less rations and still been saved from actual starvation and destitution? These are pertinent questions and I shall revert to them in a later article. But it is necessary to emphasize that the present famine has been primarily due to lack of foresight, to utter incompetence and mismanagement of all those who had any authority, power or influence over the affairs of Bengal from the beginning of Japanese entry into the war.

It may be said that after all nothing is to be gained by inquiring

how the present state of affairs has been brought about and that only the attempt to set matters right counts. If a supreme effort to save Bengal from the present famine and to prevent its recurrence was in full swing, such a plea would merit consideration, but I understand that the notion is prevailing among harassed officials who feel utterly at a loss in the face of the gigantic task before them that if only time could be killed for the next two months, the *aman* crop will be harvested and things will get back to the normal. This notion is fraught with danger and the only way to kill it is to show that the forces which brought about the disappearance of the surplus of the last crop are even more busily at work to bring about an even greater famine. Those that are in charge must take final and full responsibility for meeting the situation, mitigating the effects of the present shortage and definitely prevent a new crisis next year or in any future period. I have every confidence that if such a supreme effort is forthcoming, co-operation will be abundantly available from every section of the people irrespective of political and other differences.

It is a tragic irony that the famine should have reached its climax during the Puja festival. The conventional celebrations are going on as usual and pious Bengalis are feeding the poor at their doors according to their individual capacity. It is sad to think that there is no Vivekananda or Tagore who can rouse all Bengal from its torpor and lead it to worship the Great Mother in the only true way by killing the Asura who has risen in their midst in the form of starvation and famine. 'Bengal has no hope,' 'Our people will die like rats,' 'What can we do?' 'Let us have Section 93 and let the British Government take full responsibility.' This attitude of despair and defeatism prevails over large sections of Bengal's intelligentsia. I feel this is a disaster not less tragic than the famine itself. Only overwhelming public opinion throughout India can dispel this gloom, and drive all the forces in Bengal to work together in this critical situation.

## WHO WAS RESPONSIBLE?

### PROVINCIAL AUTONOMY—A RIDICULOUS SHAM

Before I proceed any further to describe the existing situation and the measures that are being taken to deal with it, it is necessary to give a simple and coherent account of the factors responsible for the present situation. I know I am treading on delicate ground, but I shall try to eliminate all guesses and speculations which cannot be substantiated and shall take my stand on facts which cannot be challenged by any one.

I do not believe that it will be seriously contested that the human agencies which have played an effective part in handling the food situation of this Province and therefore must shoulder the responsibility for the present disaster are the Government of India, the Government of Bengal, the merchants and politicians. In the allocation of the degree of responsibility, there will be fierce controversy. I shall not venture on any attempt to distribute arithmetical ratios. By giving an objective description of the part played by each of these factors, the general public will be enabled to make a fair apportionment. Though it may appear that the role of the Bengal Government must receive the first consideration, I wish to deal with the part of the Government of India to begin with for two reasons. It has been the fashion for the Government of India to direct the policies of the Provincial Governments and enforce them whenever it wanted but to take shelter under the so-called Provincial Autonomy of the Government of India Act of 1935 when things go radically wrong. A few instances in connection with the food policy will suffice. It was the Government of India which discouraged the Provincial Governments from building up food stocks in 1942 which would have saved the people from the price rackets and scarcities of 1943. It was the Central Government which fixed the maximum price of wheat against the wishes of the Punjab Government and later abandoned it. Again it was the Government of India which after having allowed unco-ordinated control to the Provinces for two years suddenly forced Free Trade on Orissa, Bihar and Assam at the instance of a panicky Bengal Government. One has only to read the Assembly and Council of State debates in last August to come to the conclusion that of all Governments in India, the Central Government was the most confused and incoherent relating to the momentous question of an ordered food supply for the people of India as a whole. Can anything be more conclusive on this matter than the frequent change of the Executive Council Member in charge of the Food Department of the Government of India?

In Bengal, the indirect interference of the agents of the military, munitions, supply and other departments of the Central Government were the first agencies that destroyed the price structure and the nor-

mal trade of the Province and set it on the road to famine. In the latter half of 1942, grain was bought in the name of the Denial Policy without any reference—not to speak of control—to the Provincial Government. From the beginning of this year, when it was known that the last winter crop had resulted in a big deficit, the military departments and all others connected with them including the Chambers of Commerce began to assure food supply to their own staff by buying without any particular reference to market prices and with utter disregard of the consequences of such procedure. While the spokesmen of the Government of India have been forthcoming to deny the charge of undue exports from Bengal, they have been very discreet about information regarding the quantities, areas and prices of rice purchased by the departments working under the direct control of Delhi. These departments have become independent fortresses—often hostile—which reduce the little Provincial Autonomy of the 1935 Act into a ridiculous sham. There is hardly any doubt that if the supply of rice to the Central Government Departments—military and civil—had been under the control of the Government of Bengal, the present position would not have arisen. It is plausible to argue that success over the enemy should not be prejudiced by uncertainty of food supply, but this argument should not be pushed to the extent of reducing a whole people to famine. It is needless to remark that every British firm in Calcutta is indispensable for defence and should be able to buy whatever it wants from everywhere at any price. Unless these islands of unfair privilege are eliminated and the proposition is accepted that the produce of the Province should first supply to all the necessary minimum before any privileged classes can be recognized, no sane policy can be evolved by the Bengal Government to get out of this famine. I am reliably informed that rationing in Calcutta and other Municipal towns can be immediately introduced if all the stocks with the privileged departments and firms can be pooled.

'Our statistics—as you know—are mere make-believes,' said Mr N. R. Sarker when I spoke to him about the complacency with which the food situation in Bengal was viewed till the middle of this year. His successor in the Food Department, Sir M. Azizul Haque, said the same in a little more diplomatic language that 'our greatest difficulty throughout in dealing with the food problem has been a sad lack of information.' This confession on August 9 of this year was in marked contrast to the self-complacent manner with which the spokesmen of the Government of India were doling out statistics in answer to the fears and anxieties expressed all over the country about the growing deterioration of the food position. It is no exaggeration to say that the various unco-ordinated measures of control which were taken by many of the Provincial Governments and States were due to the lack of positive direction from the Centre. Bengal suffered from these measures because her own Government did not take any measures, largely due to the anxiety not to come into conflict with the operations of the European firms and the agents of the Government of India Departments. Between 1901 and 1941, the population of Bengal had grown from 43 millions to 61 millions, while its net cultivated

area and its production of rice remained stationary. It thus lost its position as a surplus province and became a deficit area requiring a large import of foodstuffs. The actual annual imports were never definitely ascertained. From the Burma imports, Bengal took half a million tons, while about 3½ lakhs of tons of rice was sent out of Bengal, and it was assumed that normally Bengal was a net importer of only 1½ lakhs of tons. This I am told was a fundamental mistake as the grain which moved into Bengal from Orissa, Bihar and Assam was never ascertained or taken into account. It was true that the winter crop of 1941 was good, but the estimate of a surplus of 1½ million tons seems to be an exaggeration which has done a lot of mischief. The little surplus which Bengal might have had by this good luck was frittered away in many ways. I have already referred to the Denial Policy. In the early months of 1942, the evacuees from Burma had to be fed by Bengal, while new departments and industrial establishments connected with war work swelled the pressure on the existing food stock. If all these factors had been duly appreciated, the spokesmen of the Government of India would not have spoken of the handsome carry-over from 1942. When there was a deficit in the winter crop of 1942 owing to the cyclone, floods and other causes this was again under-estimated. This process of over-estimating surpluses and under-estimating deficits has not stopped even now. On August 13, Major-General Wood, Secretary of the Food Department, stated in the Council of State that the *Aus* crop, if shared at one lb. per head per day, will provide fully for the rice requirements of the 60 million people of Bengal for upwards of 90 days. This works out at 2.4 million tons. In his broadcast speech on October 8, Sir Thomas Rutherford, the present Governor of Bengal, estimated the yield of *Aus* crop at 1.8 million tons which is said by responsible public men of Bengal to err on the side of optimism. Even assuming this estimate to be fair, it is just two-thirds of the estimate of the Secretary of the Food Department of the Government of India. I can appreciate the eagerness of this gentleman to be transferred to a safer department.

If it is further remembered that the Railways and Ports are under the direct management of the Government of India, can it be denied that it is the Government of India who must share the main responsibility for the present state of affairs in Bengal? Instead of trying to shelve this responsibility which will only result in extending the area of famine to the neighbouring Provinces, it is the duty of those who are never tired of asserting that they cannot transfer or even share their responsibility for ultimate Government of India with the chosen leaders of the people, to face the task boldly and evolve a plan and procedure. In a later article I hope to sketch the outlines of what I think such a plan should be but as the distress in Bengal is so great that no time should be lost, I wish to state categorically what I think the Government of India should do for Bengal. In the next three months, Bengal should be given at least two million tons of foodgrains and a further amount of the same size in the first half of 1944 so that a complete system of rationing can be put into operation all over Bengal. Even after such an arrangement, it would be necessary for the Government of India to assume responsibility for feeding Greater Cal-



cutta and all its industrial and Governmental establishments.\* I suggest that the contribution of Britain to India in this sad plight should be judged with these minimum requirements as a standard.

\* This principle has since been accepted.

## IV

### THE PRICE RACKET

#### THE FLIGHT OF BENGAL MINISTRIES

The general scheme of Provincial Autonomy of the Government of India Act of 1935 depended on substantial co-operation between the Governor and the Ministry on the one hand and effective support to the Ministry from the Legislature on the other. Where the Ministry was backed by a large majority in the Legislature and the Governor could not pull strings with rival factions it did work tolerably as in the case of the Congress Provinces and of the Punjab. But in Bengal, equilibrium has to be established not only between the Ministry, Legislature and the Governor but between all these and the European Association which controls a solid bloc of votes enough to harass any Ministry and to upset it when it had to face internal differences. In Mr Fazlul Huq, Bengal had found a man who could do this rope-dancing by having no convictions on any matter. He got elected as the leader of the Krishak Proja Party and defeated Sir Nazimuddin who stood on the Muslim League ticket. After election, he joined the Muslim League and formed a Ministry which was apparently a coalition Ministry, but was, in fact, a League Ministry. Yet the relation of Mr Fazlul Huq with the Muslim League in Bengal and with the All-India Muslim League was anything but cordial. His relations with the Governor of Bengal were as uncertain as his position in the Muslim League and till the first Ministry resigned in December 1941, his main preoccupation was to maintain himself in office. The second Ministry which he headed had more representative Hindus in it, but it lost its title to represent the Muslims. From the first this Ministry was at loggerheads with the Governor. The Denial Policy which resulted in panicky purchase of large quantities of rice and the destruction and dislocation of many boats which play a vital part in the economy of many of these areas was initiated and carried through by the Governor and the Civil Services over the head of the Ministry. Then came the August disturbances when again the Ministry found itself flouted by its own servants. The cyclone in Midnapore at the end of last year brought about a crisis and the resignation of Dr Syama Prasad Mookerjee robbed the Ministry of the little public support it had. The Governor had his opportunity and forced Mr Fazlul Huq to resign. I have related this history only to show that so far as the food policy was concerned, the Huq Ministry had neither the time nor the power to have one. Section 93, which has become a favourite with some politicians in Bengal was in practice in operation in this matter. Finding that prices were rapidly rising owing to the purchase of grain by agents subsidized with Government funds, the Huq Ministry tried to control prices by decrees, but abandoned it after a brief trial. Thenceforward, it left things to take care of themselves finding that it was enough work to keep the Ministers where they were. Mr Fazlul

Huq revealed the pathetic plight of his in the following sentences spoken in the Bengal Assembly on March 24 of this year: 'As regards food, what the Ministers have done is to allow the fullest liberty to the officials to carry out the policy which has been laid down and approved by the Government of India, and we do not think it advisable or proper to interfere in the working of the permanent officials in this respect.' There is no doubt that for the food policy of Bengal during the second Fazlul Huq Ministry, it was the Governor, Sir John Herbert, and his officials who were directly responsible. The crime of the Ministry was to have tamely submitted to this dishonourable position and bargained for bits of patronage as *quid pro quo* for letting things go in its name.

Before proceeding to the next stage in this political drama, it is necessary to indicate the progress of the price racket as the preliminary process in the development of famine conditions. I shall confine myself to the price of rice as it is the primary and universal article of food of Bengal. The prices of other commodities also varied widely, but these variations were largely dependent on conditions outside the province and facilities for transport. In December 1941, on the eve of the entry of Japan into the war, the price of rice was Rs. 4 per maund. The purchases made in accordance with the Denial Policy of April 1942, sent it up to Rs. 4-12. It rose to Rs. 8 in September 1942, and when it was known that the winter crop of 1942 had been partially lost in floods and cyclone and was not up to normal in other areas, the price began to rise steeply from month to month—nay, from week to week—(January 1943, Rs. 10; February Rs. 13; March Rs. 16; April Rs. 25; May Rs. 25; June Rs. 30; July Rs. 32; and August Rs. 35). In August panic set in and the great trek of destitutes to Calcutta and other towns began. Prices were altogether chaotic, merchants charging just what they liked and the consumers paying the utmost they could. In places even Rs. 80 and Rs. 100 were paid. In September the Government of Bengal fixed the price of rice at Rs. 24 per maund and later reduced it to Rs. 20. This, however, could not be enforced as the Government had not stocks to satisfy even a small fraction of the demand. Small quantities are being sold at this controlled price in Government depots before which long queues are formed from the early hours of the morning. Perhaps the most heart-rending sight in Calcutta is to see the plight of these unfortunate folk who after waiting for long hours are told that the stock for the day is exhausted. Each control shop is given 8 maunds a day and each person is allowed one seer, i.e., it can distribute to 320 persons. There are 400 such shops in Calcutta and these can give this seer only to a lakh and odd persons. As this distribution does not take place on any ration card system, it is alleged that part of the stocks given to these shops goes into the black market. Firms and offices supply to their staff rice and wheat flour bought either before the institution of price control or in the black market. While it was essential to control the fantastic prices prevailing, it was a terrible mistake to have converted the open market into a black market in which prices have increased still further and resort to which is forced by absolute scarcity. As it will be shown later on, the Government

**"MISTAKES AND MISCALCULATIONS  
HAVE BEEN MADE, BUT NEVER**

**DELIBERATELY"**

**— AZIZUL HAQUE**



*The Hindustan Times*, 21-11-1943.

of Bengal by their unreasoning hostility to the commercial community failed to obtain their co-operation before declaring control of prices. If the result had only been nil in the matter of price reduction, it would not have mattered, but stocks have disappeared for ordinary folk and are obtainable only to those who are specially trusted by the stockholders. The action of these merchants is reprehensible, but each of them had acted according to the sacred law of capitalism and probably bought rice at prices higher than the control rate. He could not possibly be expected to incur individual loss from social considerations. It would not be right now to give up price control or indulge in too many prosecutions. The only way is for Government to secure possession of adequate stocks to sell at the control rate to the bulk of the population and organize people's committees to persuade and, if they cannot do so, to hunt out the private profiteer.

The Fazlul Huq Ministry went out of office at the end of March before the Budget was passed and Bengal was under Section 93 till the present Ministry was formed on April 24. It started work under some advantages counterbalanced by some handicaps. It had the support of the Governor and as a Muslim League Ministry had provincial and national backing of the Muslim community. On the other hand, it was fiercely opposed by the organized Hindu groups in the Bengal Legislature and had to depend on the votes of Europeans for its majority. It also started with an unreasoning and wholly unnecessary hostility to the commercial community, especially in Calcutta. It is said to be bitterly communal in its outlook. After a long talk with Mr Suhrawardy, Civil Supplies Minister, I have come to the conclusion that the present Ministry is fully conscious of the disaster that has overtaken Bengal, but lacks the strength to impose any strong policy on the civil services and is afraid of being misrepresented and frustrated by the Opposition. It wants to introduce rationing in Calcutta and other places, but is letting precious time pass. When the Ministry was first formed, Sir Nazimuddin declared at a tea party that rice was selling at Rs 35 a maund and that his Ministry would be judged by the vigour and effectiveness with which it dealt with the food problem. But in a few days the Ministers changed their tune and began to pretend that things were not so bad as they looked. Then they induced the Central Government to declare the Eastern Region as an area of free trade for foodgrains. This ill-starred experiment may have resulted in some import of rice into Calcutta, but it seriously dislocated the markets in the neighbouring provinces and the quantities that came into Bengal were largely appropriated by the privileged employers, while a part went into the hands of those who are running the black market. Some quantities were purchased on Government account, but as this was entrusted to a firm the members of which are the leaders of the Muslim League of Bengal, all kinds of rumours and allegations began to spread. Full publicity would have saved the Ministry from the damaging effects of these rumours, but the Ministry has tried to retire into the shell of false prestige. Since the safety of Bengal was threatened by the loss of Burma, it is believed that official corruption has increased to an enormous extent and there is a general tendency to believe the worst without any verification. Unless this atmosphere

as dispelled by an impartial public inquiry into all the commercial dealings of the Bengal Government since the Denial Policy, the present Ministry will find it difficult to work. I do not see that the present Ministry has anything to fear from such an inquiry more than its predecessor. Though constitutional propriety demands that such an inquiry should be initiated by the Bengal Ministry, it is not wrong to ask that the Central Government should insist on clearing this atmosphere if all India is to be asked to pool its resources to fight the present famine in Bengal. The mere setting up of such an inquiry will create confidence and pave the way for co-operation in the immediate task.

It is a tragic irony of fate that both Dr Syama Prasad Mookerjee and Mr Suhrawardy should hold the same views regarding the measures needed to fight the famine and yet should be unable to join together in the task. Both are convinced that all surplus stock of the next harvest should be brought under Government control from the stage of the harvest to that of sale to the consumers. Both are convinced that only province-wide rationing can adequately meet the situation. Both know that no policy has the slightest chance of success unless it is enthusiastically supported by the Muslims and the Hindus and their accredited leaders.

Before I conclude, I may add a few words about the retrograde proposal that Section 93 should be applied and that authoritarian Government should be established in Bengal also. Those that advocate this step forget that the Indian National Congress gave up its Ministries not because they were not serving the people in a way in which no authoritarian Government can serve, but because it was judged necessary in ultimate national interest to forgo the advantages of popular Ministries in the provinces. They also forget that so far as the food question is concerned, it was the civilians who would become the Advisers under Section 93 that have been in effective control and they cannot be expected to manage things better. However small may be the basis of popular support for the present Ministry, it is better than none and I have no doubt that famine relief operations in Bengal, insufficient though they are, would have been far more inadequate if power had gone wholly to the permanent officials. In the heat of controversy, it should not be forgotten that in some of the worst affected districts, Muslim peasants form the vast majority of the victims and the very communalism of the Ministry may force it to take strong measures. All disinterested efforts should be directed to broaden the base of the Ministry so that it could lay down a generally accepted policy and have it executed by the bureaucracy.

There is one matter in which the present Ministry is altogether mistaken. It is true that the commercial community has exploited the situation. But I have already shown that this is inevitable under the present system and this exploitation is done as individuals and not as a community. To dispense with their services in any plan of rationing or ordered distribution may be theoretically justifiable and even practically possible if there were unlimited time and resources. But with the famine already grown to a devastating proportion, to spend time and

energy in the creation of new trade agencies is foolish if not criminal. Experience has everywhere shown that where the trader is asked to do a definite duty under proper control and accounting, he does it. His services should be requisitioned—compulsorily, if necessary—for the distribution as well as procurement of stocks. I have no doubt that the mercantile associations and chambers of commerce will eagerly co-operate in devising and enforcing appropriate controls when they know that controlled distribution is the unalterable policy of the Government.

## V

### HOW IT BEGAN

#### THE ORIGIN OF THE GRUEL KITCHEN

Long before the rush of destitutes into the city of Calcutta began, the poorer and lower middle classes found themselves unable to buy food or foodgrains at the abnormal prices ruling from the month of May of this year. Relief was urgent and many organizations like the Calcutta Relief Society, the Birlas, the Bengal Relief Society, and the Marwari Relief Society came forward to meet the need. Relief was given in two ways. Canteens were opened at which cheap meals for two annas and one anna were given, the relief organizations bearing the rest of the cost. The other method was to run cheap grain shops. It was soon found that, though many organizations wanted to give such relief, they were unable to manage them and the strange expedient came to be resorted to by which these meals were sold by some of the relief organizations at cost price to others who distributed them free at nominal cost to the needy in their areas. It was this expedient that enabled relief to be organized successfully on a large scale when the trek of destitutes began in earnest. How and when it started is described graphically by Mr G. Ramabhadran, one of the organizers of the Destitute Relief Canteen, Kalighat, one of the best relief centres I visited:

"The influx of destitute villagers into Calcutta commenced as early as May or even before. In the beginning, women and children came in larger numbers than men. They hailed mostly from villages in 24-Parganas, Howrah and Midnapore and later Burdwan. Most of them subsisted on begging, crumbs falling from tables and pickings from dustbins and lived on the pavements. The cry of famished men, women and children for food up to midnight was the order of the day. The citizens of Calcutta were hardly prepared for these unwelcome visitors, much less was the Government. Relief work of any kind was not even thought of at that time. Philanthropic organizations and individuals were giving casual meals here and there. But this was hardly sufficient. From the beginning of July virtual starvation haunted these villagers who swarmed into the city of palaces in increasing numbers, cherishing an old belief that Calcutta is an El Dorado. Famished, infirm men, women and children lying about the pavements and footpaths, under trees, doorways, behind baffle walls, wet, weak, ill-clothed, sick and almost hopeless, parents separated from children, wives separated from husbands, dead bodies here and there and bodies of tiny children wrapped in rags and thrown into dustbins were common sights throughout the city. Hospitals would not admit starvation cases, and the police would not expedite disposal of dead bodies. These scenes received very wide publicity. Criticism and agitation by the public and the Press became stronger. Government was in a dilemma. It was too late to prevent the influx, much



less to repatriate those who had already come into the city. On July 28 Government issued a Press Note appealing to the public to establish gruel kitchens for affording gratuitous relief."

Public feeling was so deeply stirred that relief centres were organized spontaneously all over the city. The Government agreed to supply them with grain at concession rates. As a matter of fact, these rates were many times the normal rates, but the Government had to incur loss to the extent of a fourth of the value of materials supplied. When gruel could not be prepared at the relief centres they were bought in other centres. The pioneer effort of the Calcutta Relief Society organized by Messrs Niyogi and C. S. Rangaswami reads almost like a romance. Besides conducting its own seven centres in the city and a further eight in the mofussil, this Society supplies *khichri* to over 60 relief organizations feeding over 30,000 destitutes. It has evolved a formula for preparing this *khichri* at a cost of Rs 11-4-0 per 150 persons at the rate of 1½ lb. of *khichri* per adult and 12 oz. per child. The main constituents are rice, *dal*, *bajra*, vegetables and spices. There is no doubt that it is a nourishing menu, probably better than what the destitutes are accustomed to eat. But this gruel is given only once a day, and it is altogether insufficient to sustain persons in any degree of efficiency. It can just keep body and soul together. The Government have copied this method and are preparing and selling gruel from their A.R.P. kitchens to relief organizations. The official formula differs from the prescription of the Calcutta Relief Society only in using *jowar* and *bajra* to a larger extent in the place of rice. It is sold at one anna per head. In order to prevent the able-bodied from getting relief from more centres than one, food is given at all centres between 12 noon and 1 p.m. A better type of gruel without *bajra* and milk are given at some centres to weak women and children. It is gratifying to note that the non-Bengali section of the population of Calcutta has played its part in this hour of distress.

At first there was no hospital arrangement for those who were breaking down under starvation. As a result of public agitation, arrangements were made for admitting starvation cases to selected hospitals from August 16. At present nearly 1,000 beds are provided for them, but the treatment of these cases leaves much to be desired. They are frequently discharged prematurely, with the result that all the previous treatment becomes a public waste. I saw some horrible specimens in Government Relief Centre No. 6. Children hardly able to breathe, women groaning terribly, men lying in a comatose condition and hardly recognizable whether living or dead had all been thrown into this centre which is meant to lodge healthy or cured destitutes before repatriation to their villages.

In my first article on Calcutta, I remarked on the cruelty of letting the destitutes live on the pavements in sun and rain. The cold weather is fast approaching and unless proper accommodation, clothing and blankets are provided, the destitutes will die like flies. The Government are aware of this fact and have started some destitute homes. But the destitutes have so accustomed themselves to live and sleep in the streets that they refuse to go to these homes. They have

got into their heads the extraordinary notion that these homes have been started with a sinister intention and they would not go back to their villages if they enter these homes. It is the clear duty of all those who have obtained the confidence of the destitutes by unselfish service during these two months to dispel this notion and put them in proper homes.

It was after a vigorous protest from the President of the Rotary Club of Calcutta that a Police Corpse Removal Squad was organized. The religious organizations are also doing good work in this direction. Still, complaints are heard about the delay in removal of corpses and their burning or burial. There is a general fear that epidemics will break out soon and the Government of Bengal and the Corporation of Calcutta may come to recognize that it was not only humanity but common-sense and economy to have looked after these destitutes in a better fashion.

It seems inevitable that a large percentage of the destitutes will die, though I saw in one of the destitute homes some of them reclaimed to health and strength by good food and attendance. Yet the people of Calcutta are entitled to have the satisfaction that no one was allowed to starve altogether. When he saw me shocked and oppressed by what I had seen in the streets of the capital, Dr Syama Prasad Mookerjee said: "Do not be so shocked at these things. These people have at least been fed once a day regularly. Remember that Calcutta is not Bengal. Go into the distant villages and you will see sights which will tax your capacity to describe." So I am going there with a heavy heart.

## VI IN THE LAND OF THE RIVERS

### MR AMERY'S IRRESPONSIBILITY

It is not pleasant to travel anywhere these days when trains and steamers are full of the khaki-clad, going no one knows where or why. Even in normal times, touring in East Bengal is a difficult task for any but the most rich and influential. It was, therefore, a matter of good luck that Sjt. B. Kanoria, Secretary of the Bengal Relief Committee, should have arranged to tour the districts of Dacca, Tipperah, Noakhali and Faridpur when I was thinking of visiting these areas. He readily agreed to take me along, and this enabled me not only to see these areas which are among the worst affected by the present famine but also to come into close contact with all those who are trying to organize relief.

When we alighted from the train in the early hours of the morning at Goalunda, the moon was setting in the waters of the Padma and the coolies were wailing that rice was not obtainable at Re. 1-8-0 per seer. We got into the steamer for Loharjang and though our minds were oppressed by the mission on which we were proceeding, we could not remain untouched by the wild beauty of the scene. The river Padma, together with the Meghna and other rivers which run into one another in this area, forms the pride as well as the problem of Bengal. These rivers change their courses so often that it is no exaggeration to say that the people of these regions live on the former beds of these mighty streams. The roofs and walls of the houses are made of corrugated iron sheets so that they may be removed in the sites are swallowed by the water. For most months of the year communication between one house and another is by boats, and one of the most vivid impressions left on the newcomer is that of the little children going about alone in the little boats paddling their way among the bigger boats.

When I reached Loharjang I saw that Dr Syama Prasad had not exaggerated matters. If the plight of the destitutes was intolerable at Calcutta, no words can describe the plight of the destitutes of Loharjang. At the Athletic Club where we put up, a free kitchen had been organized with local subscriptions and the hungry people were fighting for the little gruel doled out to them. Most of the children were mere skeletons. A young girl of 17 had lost the use of one hand and could hardly speak. The old people were incessantly crying and falling at our feet. It was obvious that the gruel which was doled out to them could merely prolong their agony and that all feelings and sensations except that of hunger were being extinguished.

The misery of the poor destitutes was visible on their emaciated bodies, but the distress of the middle classes was no less acute. One of the organizers of the Relief Committee told me this bitter tale of his

own family. He was getting Rs 60 a month and his brother another Rs 90. His family, which consisted of 20 members, had three *bighas* of land. Yet, in the last three months, the two brothers had borrowed Rs 1,200 from their Provident Funds and the amount had disappeared in their attempts to buy rice sufficient for the family in the black market. He asked me pathetically: "What are we to do now?" In some ways, the despair of these middle class families is greater than that of the destitutes. They may not beg. Their borrowing power is exhausted and even if they can manage to get hold of money, they cannot get rice or any other foodgrain.

In the afternoon, we crossed over to the other side of the river where I saw three corpses lying uncared for; women and children were squatting or lying pellmell in slush and mud all through the narrow streets. We tried to get at the number of deaths from the records of the Union Board of Tarpassa—the name alone remaining of the original village which had been swallowed by the Padma. One hundred and nine cases of deaths from starvation had occurred in August and September and 53 in the first 11 days of October. It was obvious that many cases had been left unreported. We were told that in the whole sub-division of Munshiganj, the reported deaths averaged about 100 daily. Next morning, we met Mr Asok Mitra, the young Sub-Divisional Officer of Munshiganj. He explained what efforts were being made to relieve the distress. Out of 68 Unions in his Sub-Division, free kitchens had been opened in 45, and he had been so hard put to it to find rice for them that he did not want any more to be opened. He could not supply the 1,200 maunds of rice he had promised to the Bengal Relief Committee. He was only too ready to help any relief scheme based on bringing grain into the area. It was then agreed between him and Sjt. Kanoria that the Bengal Relief Committee could best render relief by arranging to send grain and open cheap grain sales, by giving free doles of grain to those who had homes but could not buy grain at any price, by organizing milk centres for children and by opening free dispensaries at the relief centres. It was a cordial and businesslike interview, and we tried to catch the Dacca Mail. It took the country boat, however, nearly two hours to reach the steamer station and the steamer had started when we were a mile off. So we started for Munshiganj in a dinghy (country boat) in spite of the warnings of friends that if we could not reach our destination by nightfall we stood a good chance of falling a prey to dacoits.

We left Loharjang with the conviction that we had witnessed the worst famine area, but we had counted without Munshiganj. It is the centre of the sub-division, but is a small and dirty town with only one metal road. Like the other riverside places, houses are of tin sheds, the floors are of mud and even a slight drizzle makes it impossible to walk about. We saw in the narrow streets of Munshiganj more abandoned children than anywhere else: children of all ages—a child of seven carrying another child of three. They were to be found in every corner, standing, sitting and sleeping. It was almost impossible to ascertain where they had come from and what had become of their parents. One Professor of the local college was particularly anxious

to help these unfortunate children and was able to come to a satisfactory arrangement with Sjt. Kanoria for starting a home for them. The middle classes of Munshiganj were even more distressed than those of Loharjang. Rice was not available even in the black market and the local officials had, after great difficulty, distributed five *chhataks* (10 oz.) of rice per head only once after many days, and no one knew whether and when the next distribution might take place. It was pathetic to see the gleam of joy in the eyes of the pleaders, doctors and teachers when they heard that the Bengal Relief Committee would make some rice available to them at the rate of Rs 12 per maund.

I shall not attempt to describe the physical condition of the destitutes. But I have so far not drawn sufficient attention to the lack of clothing. It is difficult to say whether there is more hunger or more nakedness in these parts. Obviously, both these monsters were competing with each other, with the result that the corpses in the streets were often utterly naked. I saw a mother savagely resisting her child trying to protect its naked body from the chill wind with a part of the rag she was wearing. All along our way in the dingy from Loharjang to Munshiganj we crossed many boats plied by boys of 10 or 12 with not a shred of clothing on their body. Girls and women could not go about in this way, but the torn and dirty rags with which they tried to hide their sex made them look many times more horrible than even utter nakedness. Winter is coming and from December the nights will be cold in Bengal and I am not sure if more people will not die of cold than even of starvation. If the magnitude and intensity of this problem can be adequately brought before the mind and the imagination of the people and Governments in India, I feel certain that there will arise an irresistible demand that a considerable share of the textile production of India should be diverted to the distressed areas of Bengal and that arrangements should be made to distribute free of cost *dhoties*, *sarees* and *chaddars* to all who are unable to pay.

The relief workers at Munshiganj emphasized the need for shelter for the homeless destitutes. They wanted the Bengal Relief Committee to build a shed for them. But, the difficulty is that a mere shed will not do. The soil is so damp and muddy that people cannot lie down on the floor without cots. It is altogether impossible to arrange for cement, brick or other flooring. The simplest thing is for the authorities to requisition public or private buildings with pucca flooring to lodge these destitutes.

I have just seen the report in the newspapers of a statement of Mr Amery, the Secretary of State for India, in the House of Commons that he estimated the deaths from starvation in Bengal at 1,000 per week. I do not know if he had been reported incorrectly, but if he had actually mentioned this figure, it would be a classic instance of irresponsibility on the part of a person of his position. In the single sub-division of Munshiganj alone, the Sub-Divisional Officer said that the reported deaths were 100 per day, but he was careful to add that it was difficult to get reports of all cases. I can say without the least hesitation that Mr Amery would have been nearer the truth if he had said one lakh per week. I should

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also say that this figure will increase in geometric progression every week up to the end of December. Though the harvesting of the winter crop may bring down the death-rate, the cumulative effect of the present starvation will have its repercussions for many months in 1944 even if comprehensive and adequate arrangements for food and medical relief could be made before the end of the year. Thousands and lakhs of deaths Bengal can possibly ignore and this was perhaps the suggestion behind the ridiculous figure given out by Mr Amery. It is really a question of saving millions, and only a complete census of Bengal after famine conditions have disappeared altogether can reveal the total number of deaths in this famine. But to seek to minimize its extent by giving such ridiculous estimates is to display a total lack of judgment and responsibility.

## VII

### THE KINGDOM OF JUTE

#### THE WOEFUL FLIGHT OF EAST BENGAL

From the fact that areas like Munshiganj and Narainganj in Dacca district are among the worst affected, it should not be inferred that they are normally poor. Quite the reverse. One is reminded of this fact by the imposing jute godowns all along the banks of the Padma, Sita Lakhya and the Meghna, and Narainganj looks like the capital of the Kingdom of Jute. It is in the jute-growing areas that suffering and starvation are at their height, and this suggests that the cultivation of jute makes these areas deficient in foodgrains. In Dacca district, for instance, the area under cultivation of jute increased from 9.1 per cent of the cultivated area in 1921 to 17.5 in 1931. The marshy and waterlogged area where jute is grown is also unsuitable for the cultivation of vegetables and roots, and hence the scarcity of rice has a far greater effect here than, for instance, in Travancore.

Another factor which has added to the suffering of these regions is the complete reversal of the price relation between rice and jute. Ordinarily one acre of land produces paddy of one and a half to two times the weight of jute. In other words, it produces the same quantity of rice or a little more. Normally the price of rice was half that of jute. Even at the present controlled rate of Rs 22 per maund of rice, the cost of rice is twice that of jute, and if the jute-grower has to go to the black market he has to sell four maunds of jute to get one maund of rice. This reversal of the price relation is bound to affect the cultivation of jute, which is expected to diminish by half in the coming year. If this process is unorganized, it may not only utterly disorganize the jute industry but also induce the cultivator to seek to cultivate rice in fields which are likely to be flooded and he may get no crop at all. It requires a planned effort on the part of the Bengal Government to restrict the cultivation of jute only to those fields which are unfit for the cultivation of rice and to establish a price parity between rice and jute so that the jute cultivator may be assured of food for his family. Jute has made Calcutta the greatest city of India and Britain has reaped more profit from it than from any other form of industrial exploitation of India. The cultivation of jute requires far more effort than that of rice and the cultivator faces a far greater risk of malaria. But all the material profit which the jute cultivator may have obtained during many decades at the cost of his health and strength is being wiped out in a single year.

The water hyacinth is a pest which threatens the economy of these regions in many ways. It is filling up all tanks and *khals*, thus blocking communication and fishing. Unless drastic steps are taken on a provincial scale to destroy this pest altogether, it may nullify all other efforts to improve agriculture in Bengal.

It is common knowledge that fish is almost of equal importance to

rice in the diet of Bengalis. The present situation has been made more acute by decline in the catching of fish. Many causes have contributed to this unfortunate result. The Denial Policy has resulted in the taking over of many boats in coastal areas. Any money paid as compensation has been spent away and the fishermen have lost their occupation. The scarcity of rice has affected fishermen perhaps more than any other single class in Bengal and starvation and death have sadly depleted their ranks. We met many fishermen who have had to sell away their boats and abandon their profession in a vain attempt to get rice for their families.

If it is further remembered that the great rivers in these areas change their courses often and swallow in a single year thousands of acres of fields brought under cultivation with great labour and also the cattle and homesteads acquired by hard-earned money, it will be easily seen that the present famine is bound to make the jute-growing areas of Bengal one of the most depressed regions of India for many long years to come.



## VIII

### 750 DIE DAILY IN CHANDPUR

#### THE FAILURE OF GOVERNMENT GRAIN SUPPLY

Chandpur sub-division in Tipperah district has the unenviable reputation of having a very high death-rate, if it has not the highest. I was able to gather more definite information regarding it than for other areas. It consists of the Chandpur town of 40,000 inhabitants and 58 unions with a population of nearly 10 lakhs. The Sub-Divisional Officer of Chandpur estimated the present death-rate for Chandpur town at 30 per day and he stated that, though he had no definite reports, it was a fair average for the whole sub-division. This works out at 750 daily or 5,250 per week. If the reader is not convinced by this statement, he may reflect on the following figures given to me by an enterprising journalist of Chandpur. From April to August 26, the Chandpur Muslim Yuvak Samity had disposed of 372 corpses. The Elgin Hospital records show 147 deaths from August 10 to October 15. The emergency hospital in the Mission compound accounted 382 fatal cases up to September and 97 in the first 15 days of October. From the Railway station compound, 106 bodies were removed in September. Allowing for deaths in streets and other unreported cases, the figure for Chandpur town up to October 15 is put at 1,500. The following are some representative figures for the villages in this sub-division: In Borgaum village of Subidpur union, 30 died in August and September. For the same period, there were 99 deaths in the villages of Aitpara, Shalda, Tamrasasanaul and Sholla of Gupti union. In October, there were eight deaths in one house in the village of Balshid and four in another. These gruesome figures ought to be enough to bring home to the reader the terrible nature of the famine in this and similar areas.

So far the main effort in the direction of alleviating distress in the Chandpur area has been through the opening of gruel kitchens. But I understood that there was neither certainty nor permanency about many of the official and private kitchens. Some are giving food only for a few days in the week, others stop after a few days, and the quantity cooked at these kitchens does not keep pace with the increasing numbers. How difficult it is to ascertain conditions in this area may be seen from the fact that it took us more than five hours in a dinghy to visit Ibrahimpur, six miles from Chandpur, where the Bengal Relief Committee has a centre. We had to walk for a mile. A motherless boy was lying in a school with high fever and crying for his father who had gone out to get some food. Children, girls, women and men of all ages were coming after having their gruel in the kitchen. Brahmin ladies, who could never have dreamed of taking food in a public kitchen, had, nevertheless, to throw off their caste and their immemorial prestige and come for the poor *khichri*. An old woman who could not walk had managed to creep to the kitchen, but

she could not creep back to her hut and was lying on the road. Men and women fell at our feet as if we were their saviours. It was all as hopeless as it was staggering.

It was with some difficulty that Sjt. Bhagirath Kanoria, the energetic Secretary of the Bengal Relief Committee, could get all the different groups in Chandpur to work together a scheme which, besides conducting free kitchens, would distribute free dry ration to helpless families living in their own homes, sell grain at concession rates to distressed lower middle classes, and open milk canteens for children and mothers with young children. Even famine has not killed the spirit of faction and political rivalry, and it is to be earnestly hoped that the new Chandpur Central Relief Committee will work smoothly. Their work depends, however, not only on their own team work but also on Government assistance to get grain. The Sub-Divisional Officer stated that there was little chance of Government supply. Like many other officials in charge of districts and sub-divisions, he had been promised big consignments, but somehow they failed to arrive. He was, however, anxious that the Bengal Relief Committee should get its own rice and *dal* and organize relief in as many centres as possible. He was fully conscious of the desperate plight of the sub-division and of his own helplessness in the matter.

## IX

### THE PROBLEM OF DESTITUTE HOMES

#### THE PITIABLE PLIGHT OF MIDDLE CLASSES

The gruel kitchen has become the main instrument of immediate relief. It is not difficult to see why it should be so. It is the easiest thing to organize in an emergency. It is elastic. Gruel made for 200 may be distributed to double the number. It is easier to mix all grains, rice, *bajra*, *jowar* and wheat flour, in gruel than in other forms of food. It is said that nearly 5,000 kitchens were at work all over Bengal catering to about two millions of starving men, women and children. After trying to turn a blind eye to the gathering crisis, when the Bengal Government woke up to the reality of famine on an unprecedented scale, they might be excused for resorting to this simple expedient as a desperate means to avoid large-scale deaths on the streets. But it is both foolish and inexpedient to be content with this form of relief or plan to continue it indefinitely. The gruel is ordinarily given once a day. From noon to the next noon, these poor folk have to be waiting for 24 hours to taste food and the physiological and psychological effects of this ordeal are bound to be disastrous. The normal ration for these kitchens is said to be 8 oz., but I doubt if the actual food received is more than half of this quantity. Besides the uncertainty of the number of destitutes attending each kitchen on any day, there is certain to be some amount of leakage in the provisions issued to these kitchens, especially when they are managed by official agencies. Another characteristic of these kitchens is the appalling lack of variety. In every gruel kitchen we visited, the destitutes fell at our feet and asked that instead of the same *khichri* every day they might be given rice and *dal* sometimes. It is difficult to imagine why this should not be done and Sjt. Kanoria promised them that he would introduce this change in all the kitchens organized by the Bengal Relief Committee. Another complaint is about *jowar* and *bajra* to which the people of Bengal are not accustomed. The case for the Bengal Government is that they could not choose in this matter. But it is easier for the middle and upper classes to adjust themselves to these grains than for the poor. The former can command ghee, sugar and spices which can partially compensate for the unaccustomed taste of *bajra* and *jowar*. The cumulative effect of all these factors, insufficient food once a day, lack of variety, and unfamiliar taste, is to make life both unpleasant and uncertain. Unless radical changes are made in quantity and quality, the gruel kitchens can only prolong the agony of the starving people and many of them will die with hardly a feeling of gratitude to those who have prolonged their lives for a month or two in this fashion. Dry rations to those who have their homes and proper destitute homes with adequate food and shelter to the homeless must take the place of the present unsatisfactory gruel kitchens. Sentiment may seem out of place in this wretched business. It is nevertheless a fact that many

self-respecting Bengalis prefer to starve in their homes than go to the gruel kitchens. This fact was adduced by a District Magistrate as a merit of the gruel kitchens. "Some indignity is necessary to keep down the relief to the minimum," he said. Administrative convenience was of more importance to this official than the loss of self-respect of a whole people. Anyone who has seen the sickening scramble and clamour at these gruel kitchens will agree that it is hardly possible for the poorest to go to these kitchens and not feel ashamed.

I have throughout emphasized the necessity of organizing destitute homes for the homeless. Unless they are done quickly and clothing and blankets are supplied to them, it is humanly impossible for most to survive the next three months. But it is no easy task to organize these homes. I saw one organized under official auspices at Comilla which was more a warning than an example. The destitutes were locked up and made to feel they were prisoners. They wildly cried to us to rescue them. They would rather die on the streets. It is necessary to make the destitutes feel they were looked after by friends. The Marwari Merchants' Committee at Narainganj has organized a destitute home for nearly a thousand persons. At first the destitutes were suspicious but by gentleness they have been persuaded that it is good for them to stay there. The accommodation and the sanitary arrangements left much to be desired and the people were not taught the elements of order and decency. It was in Faridpur that I saw a real destitute home but I shall reserve my remarks as I shall be devoting the next article to Faridpur.

The hospital for destitutes is an indispensable adjunct to the gruel kitchen or the destitute home. A considerable number of those attending the gruel kitchens are so emaciated that a hospital or a nursing-home with light nourishing food is the proper place for them. But as it is the practice of our society to devote more attention to curing disease than to preventing it, the emaciated destitutes have to go through a week or two of gruel before they are duly qualified for admission into a hospital. We saw one of the cleanest and best managed hospitals at Narainganj. The doctor explained that patients were being received in such a state that mortality was necessarily high and he pointed out two healthy-looking girls assisting the nurses as examples of how they were trying to deal with those they could save. The girls were destitutes and had been received in a precarious condition. But they had been saved, nourished and given work and no one would now suspect they were ever destitutes. Children and youths suffer far more in this famine than the old and they can also be saved and reclaimed more easily. It seems to be cruel to differentiate between the starving but the future of Bengal would be gravely prejudiced if some special efforts are not taken, not only to save but also to maintain in health the young. The opening of milk canteens all over the province is of the utmost importance. In some places where milk is provided, it is restricted to very young children up to 3 or 5 years. I think this is a profound mistake. It should be given to children up to 10 years at least, while it would be a good investment to give a drink of milk to boys and girls even up to the age of 14. Unfortunately, Bengal is poor in its

cattle and during the last year a large number seems to have perished in epidemics in Noakhali, Tipperah, Faridpur and other districts. It is, therefore, urgently necessary to provide tinned milk to centres which could not have fresh milk in sufficient quantities.

Every official whom we met asked with a slight suggestion of disdain whether we had come to help the *bhadralok*. From the days of Macaulay the middle classes of Bengal have been an object of disdain to the rulers and when later these classes showed that even the worm could turn, they became an object of distrust. The distress of those who are getting Rs 30 or 40 a month is no less than those of others attending the gruel kitchens. The lot of the peasants who own or cultivate a few *bighas* is certainly better. The middle classes may have lacked energy, enterprise and the thirst of inquiry and adventure but if their spirit is allowed to be crushed by sheer starvation the progress of Bengal would be badly endangered. The introduction of rationing all over the province will save them but till then public relief organizations need to devote some attention to them, particularly as the officials do not seem to be well disposed to consider their difficulties.

Under the complicated land tenures of Bengal, the landless agricultural labourers form an unduly large proportion of the population. In the riverside regions, they also ply the boat when there is no agricultural work. It is among the agricultural labourers that starvation is greatest and it is difficult to predict the economic consequences if some millions of these labourers die out. Even now porters at the railway stations and other manual workers are non-Bengalis coming from Bihar or Orissa. If for agricultural work also such labourers are to be recruited, the linguistic and cultural problems of Bengal may become complicated. An even more urgent issue is whether the coming harvest can be properly gathered without them. Everywhere the *aman* crop is said to be a good one but unless labour is given special facilities to move from place to place and temporary labour recruited on a systematic basis, part of the grain may be lost through undue delay.

## X

### WHERE THERE IS A WILL

#### ALL-INDIA RATIONING POSSIBLE

The steamer starts at Chandpur at the unearthly hour of four in the morning and so we got into it the previous night and slept in our cabin. It arrived at Teppakkola at 12-15 and it took five hours for us to cover the eight miles to the town of Faridpur in a dinghy. This illustrates the difficulty of doing any work in East Bengal where the rivers are so big and so uncertain that no other communication than the dinghy is available for short distances. We had only 3½ hours at Faridpur, but we had more pleasant and unpleasant experiences in these few hours than during the other six days of our tour.

Rationing has been established at Faridpur town, and it is working smoothly, though there is some grumbling—not unexpected—that half the grain ration is in *bajra* and *jowar*. The introduction of rationing in the town has reduced rates in the black market in the neighbourhood. The District Magistrate explained that he is planning to introduce rationing in all the Thana centres and finally to extend it to all persons who do not possess a minimum of five *bighas* of land. It was refreshing to meet with an official who had such a clear-cut idea of the problem and its solution. It is to be hoped that the Bengal Government will assist him to put his plan into execution as quickly as possible. He had acted in the same rational and public-spirited fashion in dealing with the destitutes. He has requisitioned the school and college buildings and lodged them there. There they are given food twice a day and an attempt is being made to give them work. We saw at one of these homes children being taught to make baskets and fans. The organization of the home for orphans was a model of its kind. A competent lady doctor was in charge and the little kids were obviously well looked after. We were told that similar comprehensive and satisfactory arrangements were being contemplated all over the district and, if this is done, even famine might leave the district of Faridpur a little wiser than before. The district is comparatively a poor one, without industries, and its crops are liable to damage by flood as well as drought.

While the District Magistrate was so wise and competent in dealing with the situation, he has unfortunately got into his head the strange notion that all non-official relief should conform to his pattern and, if possible, be given through the agencies set up by him. He was obsessed with the idea that, if other non-official agencies organized relief in their own way and through their own agencies, it would amount to an exploitation of the present distress for political purposes. He did not realize that it could be said with equal justice that his measures amounted to an exploitation of the situation to obtain popularity for the present Ministry in Bengal. But it would be a legitimate and desirable form of exploitation and I would desire

nothing better than that the present Ministry should seek popularity by bold measures of fighting famine. It may be easy to start some form of relief work, but it is difficult to sustain it in a manner to give satisfaction to many and, if any organization does it, there should be no objection whatever to its claiming credit for it. I am seriously afraid that the wise plans of the District Magistrate of Faridpur are not going to yield their full benefit if he does not seek the co-operation of all those public workers whom he seems to distrust at present. It is nothing short of a disaster that so many of the most able and patriotic sons of Bengal should be locked up instead of serving their sorely-stricken people. It is possible for District Magistrates to set up so-called committees but they lack the sense of reality and go to sleep after their formal inauguration. If the Bengal Ministry is anxious to get out of the present disaster, it should have not only big plans but also seek the co-operation of other political parties. It will be playing straight into the hands of those who want to give power neither to the Muslim League nor to the Congress nor to any other Indian agency but only seek to delay reconciliation and co-operation. They have seen how, after subjecting Bengal to an intolerable strain, all the blame is being laid on the feeble Provincial Autonomy for a national calamity. The present situation demands that popular Governments, representative of all organized and influential parties, should be in power. Unless the resources of the entire country are mobilized by such Governments, the famine will not be eliminated in Bengal but will slowly spread to other parts. Millions of men in distress cannot be managed by mere edicts of administrative measures. They require to feel all the time that their affairs are managed by their own trusted leaders.

My experiences in Cochin and Faridpur have convinced me that all-India rationing is possible and desirable. But it would require the leadership of men trusted by the people. It is foolish to say that the present crisis should be dealt with apart from politics. It cannot. Only wise political leadership can induce the masses to submit willingly to the manifold restrictions and hardships which rationing will cause. If it is undertaken by a purely bureaucratic Government, the strain at each of its millions of links will accumulate to bring about a catastrophic breakdown. At a single word from Mahatma Gandhi millions will be satisfied with a smaller ration while no amount of official statistics or explanations will make them content even with a larger one. Public confidence that every measure which is humanly possible will be taken to assure every one in India his food for the duration of the war will go a long way to prevent panic and hoarding. No foreign Government can create this confidence. I have also no doubt that Indian leaders will go a great way to be able to contribute to the solution of this fundamental problem of food. The world war offered a great opportunity for British statesmanship to make India a permanent friend of Britain. It has been missed, and Providence appears to have sent this national calamity of actual famine in Bengal and the prospect of famine in other parts as a punishment for this failure and as a further opportunity to repair the mistakes of the past.

## XI

### A TRIP TO DIAMOND HARBOUR

#### TRUE EDUCATION THROUGH SERVICE

I had arranged to visit the Diamond Harbour area with Sri T. G. Narayanan, the correspondent of the *Hindu*, on October 21. When he arrived at my place at 8 a.m. he said that a corpse was lying at the end of the street corner near the tram-road. He phoned to the nearest police station and he was asked to phone to Bhowanipore. He got angry and shouted that it was the duty of the police to inform the appropriate authority and get the corpse removed. When we got out after half an hour, the corpse was still lying there. It should have been lying for many hours while hundreds of people must have passed by. It was apparent that a dead body on the pavement has become a familiar sight. It seemed also that the citizen of Calcutta had come to feel that, however repulsive, the dead body is much less of a nuisance than the destitute mother with the baby touching him and weeping that they were hungry. It was not a good start for our trip and as a large number of the destitutes had come from the Diamond Harbour area, I was wondering whether I should have the ill-luck of seeing many more corpses. Fortunately, I did not see any more. It was not long before I could see that it was due to the fine work of the Ramakrishna Mission at Sarisha that we were spared such gruesome sights.

It is hardly possible to praise too much the work done by the Mission and the manner in which it has been done. Relief has been organized here with such comprehensiveness and executed with such systematic precision that it can be said that famine has been fought and defeated in this area. The nearness to Calcutta has no doubt helped the Mission workers here. Money and supplies have flowed from many quarters, including the Government of Bengal. The Mission is running two gruel kitchens, feeding 2,000 persons daily on behalf of the Marwari Relief Society at Calcutta. It is giving a better type of gruel to 3,200 persons at 3 other centres for the Bengal Relief Committee. It is conducting on behalf of the All-India Women's Committee one milk canteen, distributing 1¼ seer of milk each to 100 children daily and feeding at the expense of the same Committee 100 bigger children with milk and rice. It is distributing tinned milk to 185 children, the milk being the gift of the Indian Red Cross Society. Besides these reliefs in the form of ready food, it is distributing 100 mds. of rice per week free to indigent families and selling 300 mds. at controlled rates to those who are poor but could just afford to pay. The Mission has also been distributing clothing supplied by the various relief organizations. In all these various ways, the Mission has been relieving more than 15,000 persons in the four Unions in which it is working. The total population of these four Unions is estimated at 56,000 so that one in four of the people are being saved by the Mission. As the Mission concentrates more on relieving women and children,



the proportion of these may be as high as 40 per cent of the total.

I have said enough about the magnitude and variety of the work done by the Mission, but this is not the most notable feature. It is rather the spirit, the manner and thoroughness with which the work has been planned and executed that excited our admiration. The Mission has a middle secondary school for boys and a high school and college for girls. The premises of these institutions, the teachers and the senior boys and girls have been dedicated to this service of those whom Gandhiji loved to call the *Daridranarayanans*. It was an unalloyed pleasure to watch the girls arrange the women and children in perfect order, distribute milk and gruel after checking the tickets, weigh and issue rice and manage hundreds of women and children without the slightest noise or confusion. In one centre we saw more than a thousand women and children waiting patiently in a long queue more than a furlong in length without a murmur of complaint. It was kindness, system and order throughout. The *Swami* at the head of the Mission centre here was never tired of repeating that without the willing and tireless service of the teachers and hundreds of boys and girls, he could not have managed the work at all. 'Have you stopped the work of the schools?' I asked. They could not do so and so were just managing to conduct the institutions during the fugitive hours saved from relief work. It was all wonderful and yet so natural and simple. What nobler work could have been given to the students and teachers all over Bengal than this duty of rendering relief and if they had been given the work, with what zest and idealism they would have taken it up! We could note the deep sense of dignity and significance in the face of every boy and girl engaged in relief work at Sarisha, and I have no doubt they were being educated in this service in a far more real and fundamental sense than in their class rooms. It should have been done from the very beginning and much valuable time has been lost. But it is not even yet too late to entrust the relief work to the students under proper guidance and supervision. It seems to be the easiest way to fight corruption, to overcome faction and to mobilize the necessary number and energy without incurring expenditure out of all proportion to the taxable capacity of the province.

The example of the Ramakrishna Mission's work at Sarisha also brings out the need for co-ordination of the work of many relief organizations working in the same area. It is necessary to have many organizations to appeal to public philanthropy, but when they begin to work in bits in the same place, overlapping and confusion are likely to happen. While it is the obvious duty of Government to institute and administer schemes like rationing I am convinced that official machinery is not quite suitable for relief work among the poor and the depressed. It is necessary to dispel fear and induce confidence before relief can be appreciated and welcomed and owing to long years of bureaucratic rule, the masses have come to fear the officials and the latter have cultivated the habit of getting their work done more by harshness than by persuasive kindness. There are, of course, non-officials such as the old pleaders and their likes, who are naturally put into the committees formed by Government and even by political organ-

izations with an eye to the next elections and are hardly better than officials. They grudge their time and they are easily tired and irritated. The freshness and eagerness of youth can alone overcome the discomfort and labour involved in handling large numbers of ragged, distressed and clamouring destitutes.

After seeing the relief centres, we went to a village to have a glimpse of the condition of the peasants. This is the summary of our inquiries at Ishapur, a small hamlet of 45 huts, where we were overwhelmed with hospitality which took the form of unlimited quantities of tender coconut water. Only five families had land with legal rights, while there were 15 tenants on yearly basis. The zamindars and tenure-holders under them were absentee holders getting their rent at Calcutta. The richest peasant had 40 *bighas*—about 13 acres—and had just managed to keep the family going with his own rice. Others had not been able to pull through. As relief was not given to those who had lands, they had to borrow. The landless labourers were more than half the population and were getting relief in some form or other. Without the relief they would not have been able to survive.

While going by bus and while returning by train, we noted the endless stretch of paddy fields with heavy crops and we wondered how such a rich area could be faced with famine. Though there was a partial failure of crops last year, there was no flood or drought, and it was clear that the distress was due to the flight of grain brought about by the price racket and governmental acts of commission and still more of omission to take proper steps to prevent the flight. We returned oppressed with the thought that the good *aman* crop may not prevent the repetition of the same conditions next year unless immediate and far-reaching measures are taken.

## XII

### DEPOPULATED CONTAI

#### PEASANTS SELLING THEIR LANDS

At last, I have seen Contai. Ever since I arrived in Bengal, the first question asked by everyone I met was: "Have you seen Contai?" Contai was also very much in the news and it has been a sort of show-place in this tragedy. So I had put off my visit hoping to acclimatize myself to distress in slow degrees. After what I had seen at Loharjang and Munshiganj, I thought I was fit for anything and set out on my journey.

I think most of the visitors to Contai have been more or less lured to this place by discreet silence on the part of relief organizations as to the nature of the journey required to reach their destination. I started at 9 a.m. from Howrah and reached Contai Road Station, 94 miles distant, at 4 p.m. in the company of five representatives of the Ahmedabad Relief Committee. It was with great difficulty that we could get seats in the bus and, after we managed to get in, it was purgatory for the four hours which the bus took to take us through the 34 miles of the worst road I have seen anywhere. The friends from Gujarat had counted on reaching the place in the evening and had programmed to catch the train next day to Balasore. When we reached Contai at 9 p.m. and when further they found that the relief for which their Committee had generously donated a handsome amount had not started work, they washed their hands of Contai and started next morning, without seeing anything. I suggest other visitors should take the warning and set apart at least three days if they want to see anything in or about Contai.

In September 1942, the nationalists of Midnapore staged a little revolution which was met with terrible repression. On October 16, a cyclone of unprecedented ferocity broke upon the district, destroyed lakhs of houses and uprooted countless trees. In the sub-division of Contai alone, about 1½ lakhs of houses were brought down and another half a lakh damaged. It is no exaggeration to say that not even five per cent. of the houses were left intact. In the wake of the cyclone, the sea rose to unparalleled heights and the entire coastal region of Contai, Tamluk and other parts was submerged in water, seven and eight feet in depth. Almost all the cattle and the entire crop were destroyed and thousands of persons were drowned. For many days the havoc caused by the cyclone and the flood was not disclosed to the public due partly to military and partly to political reasons. When at the end the authorities were compelled to adopt relief measures, they were delayed and distorted by the political bitterness of the previous months. As if these tribulations were not enough, an epidemic of malaria burst out during the monsoon months of this year and I have been reliably informed that this has caused more deaths than the flood and the famine combined.

I must say that Contai has so long been habituated to this state of affairs that I did not notice the same intensity of sudden suffering which I saw in East Bengal. It is true I saw a headless trunk on the road to Pichávaní and skulls and bones all along the banks of the canal leading to the seashore. The uprooted trees are still lying on the roadside. I was told that this canal was full of dead bodies of cattle and human beings after the flood of last year. I was shown a small tank into which over 50 bodies had been thrown. The reader may get some idea of the calamity that has overtaken Contai from the following instances noted by me during my visit to these villages. In the village of Janurbhasan, in Union No. 12, only five families out of 45 now remain. Out of 24 members of the family of one Sukchand Samanth, 10 died in the cyclone and four died in August and September of this year of malaria. In Durgapur, the family of Surendranath Sasmal miraculously escaped the cyclone by clinging to a roof, but six died of malaria in the last two months. It was estimated that out of 100 families in this village about 150 persons perished in the cyclone last year and an equal number this year. In Narasingpur, seven members of the family of Radhamohan Naik died in the cyclone and two have been later victims to malaria. Over 60 persons from 50 families in this village have been carried away by this epidemic, which has not yet subsided.

It is hardly proper to call this state of affairs famine. The whole life of this sub-division is paralysed and over 80 per cent of the people are maintained by Government gruel kitchens. These gruel kitchens do not work regularly and I could find no answer from the officials as to what happened when any kitchen was closed for some days in a week. Sometimes cash doles were given, but little could be bought with them. There is no doubt that the high mortality in malaria is largely due to the emaciation brought about by thin gruel given once a day for many months. Gruel kitchens may be a good temporary expedient in an emergency for a limited number of people. But to put nearly the entire population of a sub-division consisting of over seven lakhs of people on gruel kitchens seems to be the height of absurdity. This has happened in the case of Tamluk and other sub-divisions. It is really difficult to see why the Government should take over the burden of cooking in addition to the supply of foodgrain. One argument advanced was economy in foodgrain. But actually the gruel kitchens require nearly 3 lbs. per head per week including children, and if this could be issued as dry ration the people would be able to make more palatable and nourishing food out of it. Another argument was that it would lead to more corruption. The truth is that there is more corruption in the gruel kitchens than is possible in any system of dry rations with ration cards and register of issues. The amount cooked at each Government kitchen cannot be checked and it is easy to distribute food cooked for 200 to 400 by doling half the prescribed quantity. Whatever the worth of these arguments may be, the simple consideration that the gruel kitchen is converting the entire people into beggars should be conclusive against its indefinite continuation.

Owing to the depopulation caused by flood and malaria, one-fourth

of the land of this sub-division has been left uncultivated this year and peasants are selling their fields for a song. The Sub-Registrar's office at Contai is the most busily worked office in the town. It works early and late, while the office of the Special Relief Officer can observe the usual hours. On an average 150 sale deeds are executed daily, each sale deed conveying one or two *bighas* (one *bigha* is  $\frac{1}{3}$  of an acre). The consideration put in the deeds ranges from Rs. 100 to Rs. 150 per *bigha*, but I was told by many that only a fraction of the sale amounts actually passed to the seller. The buyers were safeguarding themselves against any legislative action which might result in their being forced to sell back these lands bought at a time of distress. It is difficult to understand how the Government of Bengal could permit these sales by poor cultivators to middlemen who are exploiting the present opportunity.

In this situation of unmixed gloom, the work of some Relief Organizations shines as a ray of hope. The Friends' Ambulance Unit has undertaken the work of distributing milk to children. In my article on the work of the Ramakrishna Mission I tried to show how well a non-official organization with plenty of workers can work. The Friends' Ambulance Unit at Contai is demonstrating how a few workers with method and organization can render relief over a large area. It distributes milk at two or three centres every day and the milk is given as powder or condensed milk for a whole week. The mother or an elder child usually comes to the centre on the appointed day to take the milk and from the appearance of the many children brought to these centres it was evident that thousands of children were being saved by this work. I was informed by Messrs. Sudhir Ghosh and Clement Alexander, who are running this centre on behalf of the Unit, that they were extending their work so as to cover the entire sub-division. The milk is supplied by Government and the Indian Red Cross, while the Unit bears all the distribution charges. At present, 12 tons of milk are being distributed by the Unit and 10 more tons are to be added soon. The Unit is also running a few gruel kitchens on behalf of the Government and is building a destitute home. The Contai Cyclone Relief Committee has also a good record of service to its credit. It is now distributing on behalf of the Bengal Relief Committee cheap grain and organizing a cheap canteen in Contai at which meals will be available at 3 annas each. The Hindu Mahasabha has been running a hospital with 40 beds at Pichavani and has saved many patients. The Sewa Sangh of Contai is teaching spinning to many women and children and intends to organize paper-making and other cottage industries. The Ramakrishna Mission is distributing grain doles and clothing and giving medical relief in some unions. Recently Dr Soni from New Delhi joined the relief workers and is giving medical aid.

While all this relief work is commendable and should be supported, Contai cannot be redeemed from its present plight by mere relief. It requires wholesale reconstruction. It is not that Government has not been spending money. Over 31 lakhs of rupees have been issued as agricultural loans and large sums have been spent otherwise. But

there is no goodwill, kindness or affection on the part of the officials who administer the relief and there is no confidence or gratitude on the part of the suffering people. Rumours of corruption are rife. It will be an act of far-sighted statesmanship to open the jail gates and put the political workers on this work of reconstruction. The communications in this area are so difficult that a large number of workers trusted by the people are indispensable for getting any substantial results.

The most urgent task today is to fight malaria and disease. The authorities have at last realized the gravity of the situation and arranged to distribute large quantities of quinine. But medical relief of all kinds is required on a far larger scale than is available at present.

I have already referred to the alarming increase in sales of land, especially by small ryots. Though normally this district is a surplus area, some land has not been cultivated and the crop in some parts is poor. So the need for relief and vigilance will continue all throughout next year. It is necessary to stop the political prosecutions which are still going on and plan out a comprehensive programme of reconstruction. "How long would it take for Contai to get back to normal if such an effort were made?" I asked a high official. "I cannot say. It may be three years at least," he replied.

### XIII

## DENIAL POLICY IN MIDNAPORE

### UTTER DISTRUST AND HOPELESSNESS

In the old fort of Midnapore, I saw hundreds of bicycles heaped together in all states of disrepair. These were forcibly taken away from their owners in pursuance of the Denial Policy on payment of nominal compensation. In the true fashion of our bureaucracy they were not even treated as scrap iron and sent to the Munition Works. They stand till today as telling witnesses to the panic and confusion which overtook the authorities in April and May last year. When it is remembered that scarcely any other conveyance is available at Midnapore, the hardship caused to students, clerks and other poor but busy people can easily be imagined. The requisitioning of bicycles was perhaps not so serious as that of the cargo boats which were destroyed in haste. Above all came the hasty purchase of paddy and rice and their removal to other places. It is this Denial Policy which started the vicious spiral that has brought the Midnapore district to its present state. I have no doubt that the heart-burning caused by this policy aggravated the political disturbances of last year which in turn provoked dreadful repression. The cyclone completed the tragedy. Wherever one may go the uprooted trunks of big trees remind one of the cyclone of last October as powerfully as the bicycles of the Denial Policy.

The mental and moral depression of the people of Midnapore appeared to me an even greater calamity than famine and destitution. The alienation between the people and the Government seems to be complete in spite of the fact that a responsible ministry is supposed to be functioning. On invitation I met the municipal commissioners of the Midnapore town. There was not a single member who had a cheerful word to say about the present or the future. The municipality was not consulted at all in any matter concerning Government measures to deal with the famine. Similarly every public man of note had been excluded and there was not even the meagre attempt made in other districts to see that official and non-official relief did not overlap.

The prevailing mood is one of utter distrust and hopelessness. While I was at Midnapore the Radio announced that the new Viceroy had come to Calcutta and was touring in Contai sub-division. I tried to argue that this indicated a new gesture and should make them hopeful. I was pleading in vain. I have no doubt whatever that, so far as Midnapore district is concerned, mere economic or administrative measures will be useless unless they are coupled with a generous measure of political reconciliation. This district contains more than the average quota of public workers. Many of them have given generously for the relief of distress without any kind of publicity. I met here a rich zamindar who is loved by all for his generosity and patriotism.

I met another public worker who had first given all his stock of over two thousand maunds of paddy before he approached the Bengal Relief Committee for help towards the starving people around him. I was told that there were innumerable instances like this. In spite of it all, there was a general feeling that their work and sacrifice were of little avail. In the Midnapore sub-division official relief has been organized to a far smaller extent than in other sub-divisions of the district. On the other hand, non-official relief is being given in this area in a more systematic fashion than elsewhere. The Bengal Relief Committee is running 28 centres in the sub-division in which it feeds 5,000 people in free kitchens, distributes free rice doles to 1,250 people and cheap grain at Rs 12 per maund for 3,750 people. The Marwari Relief Society is running three centres and one Bihari gentleman, who is reported to have made a lot of money by contracts, is spending large sums on over 40 free kitchens.

The Poona Relief Committee on whose behalf Mr Davale has been sent to Midnapore is making a new and welcome departure. One of the saddest consequences of the present famine is that many boys and girls of poor parents have been forced to discontinue their education. Mr Davale has opened a boys' home where poor boys will be maintained free of cost. At present there are only 20 boys in this home but it is expected that the number will increase before long. I wish his example were copied in many other places and free hostels and boarding houses were opened both for boys and girls. At the Ramakrishna Mission Centre at Sarisha I noticed that over 100 girls and boys reading in school and college were taking gruel from the free kitchens. There should be thousands of such girls and boys all over Bengal who are unable to get the food necessary to continue their education. Now that the Government is stepping in to take care of the destitutes and the poorest section of the people, it is the task of non-official relief organizations to concentrate on the neglected sections of society who are also in urgent need of help.

While the plight of the destitutes has been well advertised and some efforts have been taken to alleviate their sufferings, the lower middle classes are left in a helpless condition without any attention. After declaring that the price of rice shall be controlled at Rs. 20 per maund, the Government of Bengal seems to have either been unable or unwilling to arrange for supply at that price. I was asked again and again what was happening to all the rice and wheat which were reported in the newspapers to be entering Bengal from other provinces. Were they being stocked while people were starving, or were they being distributed to privileged sections? The lack of publicity regarding the arrival of foodgrains and their disposal is creating an amount of suspicion and distrust which every Government should be anxious to avoid. The feeling that all the stocks are being consumed by Government servants under the plea of essential services is almost universal. "Neither we nor even our scavengers are classified as essential services," wailed the poor municipal commissioners of Midnapore.

Even more than starvation, the nakedness of the people strikes the visitor to Midnapore. It is impossible to describe the raggedness of the



womenfolk in the villages I visited. Woman after woman with hardly a yard of cloth to cover her womanhood fell at the feet of the Raja of Narajole and prayed for clothing. I wish that relief committees outside Bengal would concentrate on providing clothing and covering rather than seek to open free kitchens. The cold season has already begun and the nights are beginning to be chill. If prompt relief in the form of clothing and warm covering is not provided, I shall not be surprised if more people die of cold and pneumonia than even of starvation.

Next to clothing is the need for milk to children and mothers with small babies. In Midnapore town, I saw a dingy old house in which about 30 destitute mothers and their children had been lodged. It was obvious that it was started by some committee without funds and the home was being conducted in a very unsatisfactory manner. It is a great pity that there should be such a scramble for founding small and separate relief committees with little resources to do any effective work. Even if they cannot be merged into one central organization, there is no reason why they should not all work through a single executive agency, as has been happily done at Sarisha.

Medical relief is not available on any adequate scale. I was told that quinine was not available at all. Though the present crop is good in most places, some parts of Midnapore have been affected by floods. There is widespread apprehension that an epidemic of cholera may break out, and it is to be hoped that the authorities will not wait till it is too late.

## XIV

# THE PRESS AND GOVERNMENT

### WORK OF NON-OFFICIAL RELIEF ORGANIZATIONS

In a calamity of the magnitude of the present famine in Bengal the State can provide relief on any adequate scale. The Bengal Government took much time to realize this and is even now hesitating whether it cannot get off with the gruel kitchens. Later I hope to show that this is a foolish attitude to adopt and that, unless drastic and comprehensive measures are taken which will provide ordered supply of necessities not only in the present emergency but during the duration of war and some time thereafter, the present crisis will recur periodically in more or less acute forms. I wish to present in this article some reflections on the scope and methods of non official relief as I have seen it at work in Bengal. The value of non-official relief should not be judged by mere magnitude. It is more elastic and is based on intimate and friendly contact with the suffering. It has to set the standard for official relief and has also to fill up the gaps which official routine must necessarily leave open.

It was not my purpose and I had no facilities to gather exhaustive information regarding the extent of non-official assistance rendered to the people of Bengal in this emergency. It is enough to show that the response of entire India has been magnificent. It would have been even more if war-time difficulties of transport and communication and the short-sighted policy of the Bengal Government had not made it difficult for non-official organizations to render help. I cannot condemn too strongly the stepmotherly attitude taken by the authorities in Bengal towards the Press. They would not themselves let the public know the actual state of affairs. They have tried to obstruct the Press from finding and revealing the truth. It is to the credit of the Press in Bengal that, in spite of such ostrich policy of the Bengal Government, the world has come to realize the seriousness of the situation. If from the beginning the Bengal Government knew its own interest, it would have encouraged and helped the Press to paint a true picture of affairs, and then help from the other parts of India and the world would have flowed earlier and in a far more generous measure. The recent order on the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* is an illustration of this narrow-minded intolerance which has lost Bengal much assistance from outside. The district sub-divisional officers—with some honourable exceptions—have taken up a hectoring attitude towards non official relief efforts. They would not get grain for them even at control prices, sometimes they obstructed dispatch of grain secured with great difficulty by the non-official organizations, often they wanted to dictate the manner in which and the persons to whom relief should be given. The net result of all these pin-pricks has been that the relief organizations have not been able to utilize the funds as fast as they were coming in. A wise Government would have welcomed with open arms any relief coming to the

people in such dire straits and would have even gone out of the way to assist them. The Government supplies would have been put at their disposal generously, for it would have lessened its own burden.

In spite of all these handicaps, the work done by the many relief organizations has been remarkable. The following figures for the Bengal Relief Committee, the largest relief organization, will bring home to the reader the extent of the relief given by non-official effort. The Committee was organized on July 27 with Sir Badridas Goenka as President, Dr Syama Prasad Mookerjee as Vice-President, and Sjt. Bhagirath Kanoria as Secretary and Hony. Treasurer. Up to October 22 of this year, it has received over Rs. 13 lakhs in cash, 6,300 maunds of rice, 4,900 maunds of wheat, 41 bales of piecegoods, 5,000 dozens of *ganjies* (banyans) and some medicines and tin milk. It is working in 22 districts with free workers operating no less than 141 centres in which about a lakh of people receive either free food or free dry rations. It has also arranged to supply cheap grain to about one and a half lakhs of persons. It has bought cloth for a lakh of rupees and distributed another lakh as aid to local organizations. It has also been trying to organize milk canteens and dispensaries in many places.

Among the many organizations which are doing relief work I may mention the Marwari Relief Society, the Hindu Mahasabha, the Gujarat Seva Samiti, the Arya Samaj, the Poona Relief Committee, and the Seva Samiti. The work of the Relief Committee organized by the All India Women's Conference deserves special mention. It has taken upon itself the special work of attending to children and mothers of children. It is conducting 15 centres in the city of Calcutta and 11 centres in the mofussil at which over 5,000 children are being given milk or milk and rice. It has also organized seven medical relief centres in the city and three in the mofussil. Sixteen other centres are expected to be opened soon. But the most important programme of the Women's Committee is the opening of homes for orphan children, of which four are already working in Calcutta, Barisal, Diamond Harbour and Bankura. It is proposed to open four more homes with provision for 100 children in each home. As each home will cost about Rs. 2,000 per month it is an ambitious programme but one deserving the utmost help and encouragement.

While many organizations have done and are doing valuable work I could not help feeling that lack of experience and method in conducting relief work has been a great handicap. I have already shown how the Ramakrishna Mission and the Friends Ambulance Unit have been able to organize more or less model centres. It is because they have experienced and full-time workers wholly devoted to the work. In a country like India, famine and flood are bound to recur annually in some part or other and if a national organization of experienced and full-time relief workers can be built up, it would be able to convert public philanthropy to maximum use in times of emergency. I feel strongly that the present opportunity should not be lost and if a small fraction of the relief funds is devoted to this purpose, it will not only help to organize relief work more efficiently at present but will be of permanent national

## XV

### CONDITIONS IN ORISSA

#### MAKE-BELIEVE OF CONTROLLED DISTRIBUTION

I have just seen about one thousand of the most ragged humanity that can possibly be gathered together anywhere in the world. They had assembled for their bi-weekly rice dole opposite to the District Board Dak Bungalow at Rhamba which is the present headquarters of the Orissa Relief Committee for their work in the Ganjam District of Orissa. They were mostly Savaras (a caste of aborigines), Hadis (sweepers), Kondras (fishermen) and Bouris (untouchable landless labourers). There was also a sprinkling of Odiyas (peasants); and two Brahmin families ashamed of having to take free doles had sent little girls to receive them. There were men, women and children—women and children forming a large majority. Many children were quite naked. Almost all the women wore dirty and torn rags and they wept and pleaded with Shri Shyam Sundar Misra of the Servants of India Society, who is in charge of the work here, to give them some clothes. Many of them would not long be able to come to receive their doles for lack of clothing. The rags they had on were the only pieces many of them had. They could not wash them. They did not look so emaciated as the people I saw in East Bengal, but this was probably because they had been given free rice or paddy doles by the Orissa Relief Committee from the beginning of last August. But even in Bengal, I have not seen such desperate need of clothing.

If a wound is not properly attended to, it becomes a festering sore. It is what has happened to the coastal area of this district, consisting of a large part of the Chatrapur and Berhampur sub-divisions. This region is subject to cyclones, but the cyclone which burst upon the people on November 15 and 16, 1942, was unprecedented in its severity. The Chilka Lake rose suddenly many feet and many villages along its shores were engulfed. An official report says that in Palur, 438 persons perished, 7,169 cattle were drowned and 42,115 houses were destroyed or badly damaged. The Government took some measures, organized a relief committee, collected funds, made some grants and spent nearly a lakh of rupees in gratuitous doles for food and housing. It gave also Rs 36,000 as loan for house-building, purchase of cattle and seeds. Rupees five was given to a house completely destroyed and Rs 2-8 to one partially damaged. A strong wind which blew a few days ago has blown off many of the roofs of these tumble-down huts. It seems to be hardly worthy of any Government to allow people to dwell in such miserable hovels.

Besides uprooting trees and houses and killing men and cattle, the cyclone and the flood had destroyed all crops in the area, the fishermen lost their equipment and nearly fifty thousand families had been rendered helpless. Many of them found some work in harvesting operations for the next two months, but when these were over, they

had neither labour nor food. The authorities persistently turned a blind eye to the growing distress till in August deaths from starvation began to take place in many parts, and destitutes flocked to Berhampur and Chatrapur. In the town of Berhampur, 22 corpses were disposed off by the Municipality in August. The figure rose to 32 in September and to 72 in October. Something had to be done and the District Magistrate who is a conscientious officer, deeply distressed at the state of affairs, has been organizing free kitchens with public donations supplemented by Government grants. But some of these kitchens are not running satisfactorily. At Berhampur, food cooked for 600 was being distributed to double the number. Other relief agencies have appeared on the scene. The work done by the agent of the Orient Paper Mills deserves special mention. Sri G. D. Birla on behalf of the mills has given a sum of Rs 50,000 for relief in Orissa, but the donation, handsome as it is, would not have merited much commendation if he had not also sent his agents to organize relief camps so that the money can be actually converted into immediate help to the suffering. I saw one of the camps at the village of Ganjam which is one of the worst affected centres. Here free food is being given to 700 people and free rice doles at 8 oz. per head per day are being distributed to 500 families. Arrangements are being made to distribute milk to 200 children. The relief camp had been started only a short time ago, when signs of famine were visible in the appearance of the destitutes that gathered at this centre. The agent showed me some children whom he had picked up in a state of collapse and nursed them back to health.

While the officials and other agencies deserve praise for what they have done, it must be admitted that the only organization which has stood by the poor people of the area steadily and stimulated and set the standard for the others is the Orissa Relief Committee of which Sri A. V. Thakkar is the President. After the cyclone of last year, the relief work in Ganjam district was entrusted to Shri Shyam Sundar Misra who first established his camp at Palur where the cyclone had struck most heavily. Almost all the houses at and around Palur had collapsed and besides providing food and clothing, the main work of Mr Misra was to provide building materials, money and doles to fishermen and others to get back to their normal occupations. When immediate distress had been relieved, he organized cheap grain shops at four centres which came to an abrupt end in July, because no rice or paddy could be obtained for love or money. In August he resumed his work at Rhamba, a beautiful place on the shores of the Chilka Lake, as his headquarters. The people had by now been reduced to such a state that they had no money to buy grain. So, he has been giving rice doles to 1,019 families consisting of 3,482 persons—adults and children—at the rate of 6½ oz. for adults and 3½ oz. for children. From October 1 he is giving milk for 400 children below the age of three. So far, the committee has spent in this district Rs 19,000 in cash besides distributing Rs. 6,000 worth of clothes. In my opening paragraph, I have tried to show that the clothing distributed is a drop in the ocean.

The distress of the destitutes is only the last link in a chain of social suffering of varying degrees. The district of Ganjam has always

been a deficit district though, strangely enough, the Orissa Ministry had only recently acknowledged this fact with great reluctance. Formerly, much paddy and rice used to come by boats from Puri through the Chilka Lake besides other quantities by rail from other places. The military restrictions on boat traffic coupled with the policy of the Ministry in encouraging and assisting export of rice from Orissa brought about a state of affairs in which rice was not available at all in the months of July and August. In Berhampur and Chatrapur, it is being distributed at the controlled price of Rs. 11/6 per maund. At first the ration was fixed at 20 oz. per head but it has had to be reduced to 12 oz. While these towns are getting some supply, the rural areas are being practically starved. In a statement issued under the signatures of the three Ministers dated 20-10-43, it is claimed that supplies are distributed in 'a controlled manner' in the rural areas which were affected by the cyclone. In Rhamba, for instance, only 4 annas worth of rice is issued per week to a family. If this is controlled distribution, then it is only a make-believe intended to deceive the outside world. What I have noticed in Travancore, I have observed here also. The rural areas are neglected to satisfy the clamour of the towns. I saw poor villagers going to Berhampur to buy rice from private shops at prices much higher than that at which it is issued to the richer town-folk. It was obvious that sufficient stocks were not being received by the district. In the statement referred to above, it is stated that 1,000 maunds a day were being supplied to this district. Normal deficit alone would require four times this amount and owing to the failure of crops last year, a far larger quantity would be needed if the villagers are to get even half the ration issued to people in Berhampur town. It is not the claim of the Ministers that the province of Orissa is unable to provide the rice needed by Ganjam district. I shall examine their justification of export in another article. Meanwhile, it is enough to say that if Ganjam is suffering, it is not owing to lack of stock as in Bengal but because of incapacity or unwillingness of the Orissa Government to do justice to the people of the district. "I am an Oriya but I have to confess that we would not have been let down so badly if we had remained in the Madras Province," said a prominent person in Berhampur. The words might have been said in bitterness but the present Ministry would do well to note them. The readers of this article would be surprised to know that not one of the Ministers has visited Berhampur town or the famine-stricken centres during the last six months. Whether it is due to fear of popular displeasure or to shame at their inability to manage matters better, I cannot say.

Part of the area which suffered last year has not been cultivated and in the rest, the standing crops are poor. It is doubtful whether even a four-anna harvest will be realized. Fitful and haphazard measures will not do. Unless the region is declared a famine area and organized work and relief are given in a comprehensive fashion, the coastal taluks of Ganjam district are likely to become a permanent home for famine. In the long run, it will cost the Orissa Government much more than if it tackles the problem immediately.

## XVI

### SANTHALS OF FATIABAD

#### AN INCOMPETENT MINISTRY

"Do any Government officials visit this area?" I asked Sri Iswarlal Vyas of the Gandhi Seva Sangh as we walked on interminably to the Fatiabad area. We were told that we would have to walk for five miles but we took nearly three hours and a half to reach Kumara Sole from Jaleswar. There is no road or even cart track during the latter half of the way and it is not to be wondered that only high spirited national workers would like to go to such remote parts. Whether by accident or design, a health officer turned up there for the first time next day when we were leaving. "I heard that there was Vitamin B deficiency in this area. Can you tell me what difficulties you found in this part?" he asked. "I do not know about the Vitamin B deficiency but the people here have neither work nor food," I replied. He was a kind man and felt distressed but he was only a health officer and promised to do what he could in the matter of medical relief.

In this area, there are about twenty thousand Santahls, an aboriginal tribe, who are simple folk not accustomed to lie or cheat. They have lost their lands to others who know more about law and money. They have become landless labourers living from day to day on their scanty earnings. They keep their houses and neighbourhood clean and would keep their clothes also clean if they had them. But the cyclone of last October which devastated Midnapore District in Bengal had also struck with equal ferocity on the Balasore District of Orissa and the crops in the Fatiabad area had been destroyed. These primitive people had no work and no food but they did not know and did not dare to approach any official. In this plight, Sri Iswarlal Vyas came to their rescue and established an ashram for spinning. Since August distress increased to such an extent that relief in the shape of food or grain had to be given. The Orissa Relief Committee enabled him to open three centres where over 2,000 people are getting food from free kitchens. One of the kitchens—at Kumara Sole—has been taken over by the Orient Paper Mills.

I gathered that over seven hundred people had died in this area from starvation in the last three months. In Gokundi, for instance, out of a family of nine six have died. Before every house, we saw heaps of chaff gathered from the threshing floors in the neighbourhood. The chaff is winnowed many times and the little grain which is obtained thereby is used to supplement the food from the free kitchen. At the Ashram established by Sri Vyas there are forty orphan children and eight women abandoned by their husbands. I saw a similar batch of orphans at Rhamba at the relief headquarters there. Another batch has been gathered at Jaleswar. These orphans present one of the most difficult problems to the organizers of relief. In their case relief has to be permanent and nowhere did I find any

adequate plan to organize orphanages for these children. Naturally immediate relief to the starving must take the first place but the question of founding orphanages should not be postponed till public interest has cooled down. It would be wise to set apart a certain proportion of all relief collections for this purpose. The easiest thing will be for the Provincial Governments to bear the burden of these orphanages but I am not hopeful they will do so. I feel sure the present Government of Orissa will not.

I have stressed the distress in the Fatiabad area not because it was the most affected but because the population there is the most helpless. Other areas in Balasore District like Bogri, Paliapal and Singla have suffered terribly, almost like Contai and Tamluk. In parts of Puri and Cuttack relief kitchens have had to be opened. The Merchant Relief Committee of Orissa and under its auspices, the Orient Paper Mills besides the Orissa Relief Committee, are rendering invaluable service.

Of all the regions in which famine and distress prevail at present, it is in the case of Orissa that it is entirely man-made. In Travancore and Cochin there is a natural shortage which the authorities are bravely trying to meet. In Bengal, a shortage was allowed to develop owing to many causes which have already been dealt with in a previous article. In Orissa, on the other hand, it is the claim of the Government that there has been no shortage of rice and that in fact there has always been an exportable surplus. In the statement issued by the three Ministers on 24-10-43, it is claimed that Orissa—excluding the States—has a normal exportable surplus of at least 24 lakhs of maunds of rice and other foodgrains. The statement wisely refrains from giving the estimate of loss due to the two cyclones of last year and justifies present export on the basis of figures of past years. It goes on to say grandly that "India as a whole is economically indivisible in spite of provincial boundaries and if Orissa wishes to retain its place in the economic and political structure of India, it should come to the help of other and more distressed parts of India to the best of her capacity." Any outsider reading this statement is bound to conclude that there could not be much distress in Orissa. As a matter of fact rice or other foodgrain is not obtainable in the rural areas of Ganjam District and in many parts of Balasore. In Berhampur town the Government started with a ration of 20 oz. but had to reduce the same to 12 oz. How any responsible Ministry can plead for export before it has provided for its own people is inconceivable. But the Orissa Ministry is not responsible. It is assisted in this irresponsibility by the lack of publicity for the Orissa Province. The local Press with a single exception is subsidized and there is no newspaper in Orissa of all-India importance.

The distress in Orissa is due to the Government of India and its Prime Minister, the Mahatma of Parlakimedi. About the part of the Government of India, it is enough to quote from the statement of the Ministers already referred to. "We are aware that the distress in North Balasore has increased. This, however, is due to no fault of Government. It is the result of a variety of factors over which Government had no control, namely: (1) The introduction of free trade



by the Central Government which caused unprecedented rise in prices which Government had no legal power to control; (2) fairly heavy exports during the free trade period from Balasore district which Government had then no legal power to prevent, etc." Dealing with the position of the Ganjam District, it says: "Here again as in Balasore the introduction of free trade and consequent depletion of stocks of foodgrains and rise in prices aggravated the distress." How much Orissa has had to pay in distress owing to the sudden and ill-considered experiment of free trade when prices in Bengal were sky-high can be found out only by a proper commission of inquiry. It is strange that this imposition on unwilling provinces seems to be unknown to Mr Amery and others who have bemoaned the fetters placed on the Central Government by Provincial Autonomy.

About the Prime Minister of Orissa, one friend at Berhampore said that he was found more often in Poona, Calcutta and Delhi than in his own province. He has never cared to visit or inquire into the distress in his own province. The only time he officially visited the Ganjam areas was last April when a few rickety huts were erected in place of those destroyed by the cyclone and the new village was named after the Maharaja, "Gajapathinagar." Since then thousands have died in this area from famine but had not the good fortune to attract his attention. When I tried to discuss his contention that Orissa is a surplus province with an Orissa official he politely declined saying that the figures for one side or the other could not be relied on. After all the proof of the pudding is in the eating. The Orissa Government is bringing into the Ganjam District only 1,000 maunds a day while at least 4,000 maunds is necessary to provide the people the minimum required at control prices. If this inability is due to incapacity, it is time there is a change. If it is due to actual lack of sufficient stock, the Maharaja is talking irresponsibly. He should not forget that he is holding office because many members of the Orissa Assembly are in prison. Some day or other, proper inquiry will be held as to why Orissa, a so-called surplus province, allowed famine conditions in a large part of its territory.

The people of Orissa have not the same cash resources as those of Bengal and cannot afford to pay high prices. The present controlled price of rice is over Rs. 11 per maund as against pre-war price of Rs. 3 and a large section of the population cannot buy at this price. It is this impossible price that is creating the appearance of surplus. When this difficulty reaches the point where the people have actually to go without food, the anomaly of a surplus province suffering from famine becomes apparent. It is utterly disastrous for the Government of Orissa to export any rice or the Government of India to agree to any such export till the deficit areas are supplied with adequate stocks. If there is any surplus afterwards, it will be time enough to come to the help of other provinces.

## XVII

### PRESSURE ON LAND

#### THE NEED TO BUILD UP STOCKS

"How many are you in your family," I inquired of a friend who had come to receive us at Noakhali and who was bitterly declaiming at the distress of the middle classes. "We are fifty souls in all," he said. I was astonished and wondered whether by some freak of tradition the Malabar Tarwad had been transplanted in East Bengal. Oh, no. The family consisted of a father, his six sons and their six wives and thirty-seven children of these six sons. There were some daughters, but they were married and were only occasionally present at the family mess. This may appear a rather extreme example, but families of 20, 25 and 30 are rather the rule than the exception in Bengal. Though this is not the immediate cause of the present famine, this pressure of population makes it a dangerous neighbour likely to step in at the slightest excuse. Taking Bengal as a whole, the sown area comes to 60 cents per head. In East Bengal it is even less. For instance, Dacca has only 14.4 lakhs of acres for a population of over 42 lakhs, which works out at 35 cents per head. Out of a total area of 17 lakhs of acres, 14.4 is under cultivation, 2.1 lakhs are not available for cultivation and only about sixty thousand acres are classified under culturable waste. This means that almost all land fit for cultivation is sown and there is practically no room for extension. In Faridpur district, there is not even a single acre of forest or culturable waste and the acreage per head is 50 cents. In East Bengal, the density per square mile in 1931 was 668 and it must be greater now. It cannot be far short of the figure for Travancore which was 796 for 1941.

How the population and the pressure on the soil of Bengal have increased rapidly is shown in the following table:—

Year	Population in millions	Density of population per sq. mile
1901 ..	42.8	548
1911 ..	46.3	593
1921 ..	51.0	607
1931 ..	57.5	658
1941 ..	61.4	740

On the other hand, the cultivated area does not show any expansion. In 1916-17 the net cultivated area actually cropped was 24.7 million acres, while in 1936-37 it was only 24.5 millions. The acreage under rice increased only slightly from 21.1 million acres in 1917 to 21.9 million acres in 1936-37. This did not, however, result in any increased yield of rice, the estimated yield of both years being 250 million maunds. The benefits of British rule are reflected in an increase in the population while they seem to have reduced the fertility of the Indian soil. For, comparing the yield of rice in import-

ant countries of the world, we find that in 1913 the average yield in India was 932 lb. per acre against 1,952 lb. in Italy and 1,827 lb. in Japan, while in 1938-39, the average for India fell to 728 lb. per acre in contrast to the increase in Italy to 2,905 lb. and in Japan to 3,276 lb.

In appearance, no two regions can be more unlike than Travancore and East Bengal. The former is a mountainous region full of forests, while East Bengal is a level paddy field lying almost on the beds of some of the broadest rivers in the world. Yet these two are running a race in big families and density of population and are the most thickly populated areas in India. It is for experts in physiology and sociology to say whether this coincidence is fortuitous or is based on similar causes in spite of the apparent differences of geography. There are, however, some common factors which may partially account for this strange phenomenon. Both the regions have an annual rainfall of about 100 inches. The main diet of the people in both is rice and fish. The hills in one and the rivers in the other provide good drainage and reduce the rate of mortality. The houses are scattered and not grouped in large clusters.

It is only the natural fertility of the soil in Bengal that has so far borne this tremendous pressure of population. Both the people and Government seem to have left things to nature. I cannot help feeling that this method cannot go on hereafter and that planned effort is needed to restrict, if it cannot be altogether eliminated, the change of courses of the rivers and *khals*, to extinguish the water hyacinth, to introduce better standards of housing, especially for flooring, to organize rotation of crops, and introduce scientific fish culture. But mere planned economy will be useless without planned control of population. I do not wish to tread on the delicate ground of the methods of population planning, but it is evident that unless Bengal finds means and ways to limit her population by intelligent methods, nature will step in and do the job in its own crude and terrible way. I am repeatedly told that the present famine is comparable to the great famine of 1770, and Bengali thinkers tend to ascribe both to political causes. It is needless to say that politics cannot be separated from economics. It should be admitted that if Bengal politics had been more stable and public-spirited, the intensity of the present famine could have been mitigated to a considerable extent by timely and far-sighted measures. But the consideration of immediate and temporary causes should not make anyone forget the irresistible tendencies of natural forces without which the temporary factors cannot do much harm. The problem of population is not peculiar to Bengal. It is common to India, China and many other countries. But the present famine should induce the leaders of Bengal to concentrate their attention on it immediately.

Another reflection arising from the present famine is the need for a stand-bye to rice. Bengal is dangerously dependent on rice. I have shown how Travancore has been saved by tapioca. I do not know if any such subsidiary crop can be grown in Bengal. I am told there are possibilities for potato cultivation on a big scale. The months

intervening between the harvest of the *aman* crop and the next monsoon should be used for all kinds of dry cultivation. The people of Bengal are being forced with great reluctance to get accustomed to *jowar* and *bajra* and it will be wise to encourage them to get into the habit of using these as a permanent part of their diet.

We have seen how price control without control of adequate stock is impossible and that without price control scarcity is accentuated by panic. If the experience of Bengal is to be fully utilized to prevent its recurrence elsewhere, it is the duty of all Governments in India and the Government of India as the co-ordinating authority to arrange for the building up of stocks during normal years. The knowledge that stocks for six months are lying with the authorities and will be released to prevent abnormal price fluctuations and to meet special needs of particular localities will be of incalculable benefit to Indian agriculture and the best possible insurance against famine in any part of India. It was the duty of the Government of India to have built up such stocks when the threat of war began to loom on the horizon. But it failed to take any steps even after war had been declared and actually discouraged Provincial Governments and States from doing so. Now Bengal is sucking up all the carry-over of other parts and next year the whole country will have to live from season to season. This can be managed if a nation-wide plan for rationing and controlled distribution is rapidly evolved and put into force.

But such a plan requires two things (1) an initial grain reserve, (2) public co-operation. In the present conditions, a grain reserve cannot be built up from local stocks and so it has to be brought from outside. The annual deficiency of India has been estimated at 2.5 million tons and if the Government of India can buy this stock for 1944 from Australia, Canada and the U.S.A., it would be a solid foundation for a solution of the present muddle. The sterling reserves of the Government of India cannot be used to a greater or more beneficent purpose. Shipping will of course present a difficulty. Here again the simple course is to request Britain to arrange with the U.S.A. to put forty or fifty ships at the disposal of the Government of India for this purpose.

About the need for enlisting public co-operation for any rationing scheme it is not necessary to say much. I cannot imagine that even the bureaucrats of the Government of India believe in their ability to carry it through without the active and enthusiastic support of the Indian people and their accredited leaders.

# THE CRY OF DISTRESS

NOT EVEN COLD DRINK



"A population of 62 lakhs which will leave its indelible impression more particularly on the future generation of Travancoreans" —Sir C. P. Ramaswamy Iyer

The Hindustan Times, 16-10-1943.

## XVIII

# TRAVANCORE BADLY LET DOWN

### NOT EVEN ONE MEAL A DAY

"Are we not Indians? Why are we treated like this? Is this fair?" These were the words with which I was greeted at Shencottah, the first Railway station on entering Travancore State. I had to hear the same remarks again and again all the way from Trivandrum to Trichur in Cochin. The feeling that these two South Indian States have been badly let down by British India is unanimously prevalent among officials and non-officials there. As I was nearing Shencottah, I heard that prices of all foodstuffs were rapidly increasing. Rice, *dal*, milk and *ghee* were selling at nearly double the prices on the Travancore side of the border as their transport from the adjoining areas is strictly prohibited. Some smuggling was said to be going on but drastic measures were being taken to put it down and the Collector of Tinnevely was confident that his measures were succeeding. Allowing for the bitterness due to great scarcity, it has to be admitted that Travancore and Cochin have been treated shabbily by the Governments of India and Madras. The latter may claim that Madras being itself a deficit province, they have to look after their people first. Still, it has to be remembered that if unity of India has any meaning at all, the difficulties in such a primary matter as food have to be shared and it would have been fairer to assume that these two States formed a part of the Province of Madras for this purpose. In sharp contrast to the isolation forced on these States, it was pleasing to note that the Governments of Travancore and Cochin have combined to meet the situation in co-operation. They have agreed to ask for a joint quota from the rest of India and divide the proceeds in the ratio of their population—four-fifths to Travancore and one-fifth to Cochin.

Kerala is a land of beauty and in Kerala Travancore is the most lovely part. As one enters the State from the adjoining flat areas of the Tinnevely District, one feels that the people of a region so beautiful could not lack anything. Unfortunately, the timber forests, the coconut groves, the lakes and lagoons which so charm the eye of the traveller make Travancore deficient in all the primary foodstuffs. The State grows only about a third of the rice it requires and used to import annually about 5 lakhs of tons from Burma and Madras. The imports from Burma stopped at the end of 1941 and those from Madras were prohibited at the end of 1942. The State has always been deficient in milk and milk products and produces only a small quantity of pulses. As against these it has coconuts, tapioca and fish and if it could get at least its need of rice, it can pull through without much difficulty. The result of the attempts of the Government of Travancore to get this rice has been summarized as follows in a recent Press *communiqué* issued by them.

"To meet the monthly deficit in rice of over 30,000 tons, the Government of India, under the original basic plan, allotted two lakhs of tons

of rice, 1,68,000 tons of millets and over 10,000 tons of wheat for Travancore. The basic plan, however, broke down before it had begun to work. The actual receipts under the basic plan for Travancore and Cochin together amounted only to less than 7,000 tons of rice. At the Food Conference held in the first week of July in Delhi, the situation was fully explained and a minimum allotment of 1,11,552 tons of rice and a small quantity of wheat was asked for under the revised basic plan for August to November. The actual quota allotted was, however, 12,000 tons of rice and 12,000 tons of millets for August to November and 31,112 tons of wheat and 7,200 tons of gram for August to March. In other words, the State will get a monthly quota of 3,000 tons of rice, 3,000 tons of millets, 3,889 tons of wheat and 900 tons of gram to meet the monthly deficit of over 30,000 tons of rice. The rice thus allowed does not cover even one-tenth of the actual deficit and notwithstanding the quota of millets, wheat and gram taken together, there still remains a monthly deficit of 19,800 tons. Government are aware that millets and gram constitute a novel diet to Travancoreans who have hitherto been accustomed to a purely rice diet. But in this national emergency every attempt has to be made to popularize the consumption of millets as a supplement to or in substitution of rice. Government are taking every step in this direction."

This statement omits two facts for fear that the officials of the Government of India might be offended. The little rice supplied comes from Sind and Eastern States, millets from the Punjab States and wheat and gram from the Punjab, Sind and their adjoining States. The price at which rice is supplied from these places is from Rs 10 to Rs 15 per bag above the controlled price in Madras and the State authorities have to sell the rice at less than the cost price and make up the deficit by putting a charge on the local paddy requisitioned. It is pertinent to inquire whether any rice is being bought for military purposes in Madras and, if so, why it should not be handed over to Travancore and Cochin and the rice from Sind and Eastern States taken for the Army. It is also a cruelty to supply these States with millets. As ill-luck would have it, the appearance of *bajra* (*cumbu*) coincided with a cholera epidemic with the result that the aversion to millets to which the people in Travancore have never been accustomed has increased in spite of official propaganda in their favour. There are many deficit regions like the Ceded Districts in Madras where millets are relished even more than rice, and it indicates the confusion and inefficiency prevalent in the food policy of the Government of India that millets should have been dumped on the people of Travancore and Cochin. At Trivandrum a student explained how his family were dealing with their *bajra* ration. They sold the *bajra* at half prices to poor people who could not afford to buy their rations and bought the wheat portion of the latter at double the price.

The authorities of the State have tried to conserve and increase the meagre supplies available in the State. They have been acutely conscious of their precarious position and from 1941 have taken a series of measures which have finally resulted in complete State control of the distribution of paddy and rice and other foodgrains within the State. It would have been better if from the first this bold step had been taken, but the State has after all an authoritarian bureaucratic Government

and it tried to manage through edicts. The traders were asked to submit returns and take permits, prices were sought to be controlled and producers were bullied, but the result was only bribery and black market. From the beginning of this year, the State authorities have undertaken the direct responsibility for the distribution of rice and other foodgrains and, though black market and bribery have not disappeared, some order is slowly being evolved out of the chaos. As the State has to rely principally on its own paddy production, the requisitioning of paddy has become a major problem. At first, the district officials were given the discretion to fix the quota for each landholder, but the result has been very disappointing as only one-third of the expected amount was collected. "So long as the State has to rely on the Proverthicans—village accountants—I have no fear," declared a rich landholder who gives a little to the State and a great deal to the black market. The authorities are trying to prevent evasion by fixing minimum deliveries based on settlement estimates, but I doubt whether they will succeed to any great extent unless they devise new methods and machinery to estimate and collect the quotas. So far as positive methods to increase production are concerned, something has been done—especially in increasing the Kayal or deep water cultivation. Lakes having about six feet depth of water are bunded, water pumped out and sown with paddy. It is a risky and difficult operation, but it is often rewarded with good crops as the monsoons bring fresh soil into these lakes. Tapioca cultivation has increased greatly and its export has been prevented. From the beginning of this year, there has been some sort of rationing in the State. In the towns the Municipal authorities were entrusted with the business, while in the rural areas the officials assisted by village and taluk committees did the work. But the Government servants and factory employees got their rations direct through their offices. The ration was not uniform. In urban areas, it was 6 oz. per day per adult of which half was in rice and the other half in wheat and millets. The ration fixed for Madras in 21 oz. and the Foodgrains Policy committee of the Government of India recently suggested that the minimum ration should be one lb., i.e. 16 oz. It is not, therefore, surprising that every townsman in Travancore I met wailed that he was not getting even one meal a day. So far as the rural areas were concerned, rationing was altogether nominal. The District Collector allotted some bags which he could spare after allotting to the towns and this was distributed to all the inhabitants. Often it came to no more than an ounce per day.

"Are the people of Travancore starving?" This was the question I put to many and I presume this is the issue which will interest the reader most. The answer can best be given in the words of the able and masterful—alas, often too masterful—Dewan of Travancore, Sir C. P. Ramaswami Iyer. "You will not find starving persons or dead bodies in Trivandrum or elsewhere in this State as in Calcutta. Our people have many green things with which they fill their bellies when they are very hungry—tapioca, jack, plantain and other roots. But large numbers of people cannot go on like this without the food they are accustomed to without feeling great distress and suffering from malnutrition." While



the people of Travancore may not be actually starving, they are hungry. As large numbers have entered the army and the Assam Labour force—I understand the total is 75,000 for Travancore alone—and as wages have increased in many occupations, though not in all, there is not so much scarcity of money. But among the thickly populated rural folk almost scientifically spread out among the coconut compounds, there must be thousands who are unable to get any food. It is enough to cite two instances. In Kuttanad I found a Christian family of eight which got on the whole only 8 annas a day. Even tapioca could not be obtained in sufficient quantity as the price of green tapioca was 2 annas for 3 lb. in spite of the Government price of 9 lb. for 2 annas. So the family was living on some green gram once a day and starving altogether on some days. Another Ezhava family consisting of a mother, son and 8 small children were living mainly on the slender charity of their neighbours. A large amount of relief work is waiting to be done as relief to the destitute is available only at Trivandrum and one or two other towns. I asked many public workers why they were keeping quiet. The uniform answer was they dared not start any work except under official auspices. In spite of the proclaimed desire of the authorities to get non-official help in dealing with the food crisis and in spite of the earnest wish of every group to help, I could not help remarking that suspicion and distrust on both sides were preventing any effective co-operation without which all official measures, however well planned, will prove ineffective. "I have seen people eat tapioca leaves and I have heard that in one place coir dust was eaten with a little jaggery to still the pangs of hunger," said a high official.

## XIX

### COCHIN'S EXPERIMENT

#### SUCCESSFUL STATE-WIDE RATIONING

Cochin is a smaller edition of Travancore with a little more paddy and much less of tapioca. It has the distinction of being one of the most thickly populated parts of India. According to the 1941 Census, its average density is 961 per square mile against 796 for Travancore. In certain rural areas, the figure reaches 2,000 and in one it is even double this number. It has a fine harbour and as one enters it by boat from Alleppey, it presents a magnificent view, which one will not easily forget. For its 14 lakhs of people, it requires 2.3 lakhs of tons of rice at the moderate rate of 1 lb. per head. Of this, it produces about 80,000 tons and used to import the balance of 1.5 lakhs. When the imports were cut off by the loss of Burma and the prohibition of export from British India, the people of the State were reduced to extreme hardship. In Travancore, tapioca proved to be a good stand-by though it could never seriously displace rice, Cochinites had not even this resource and it is only now that attempts are being made to encourage cultivation of tapioca. The Government of Travancore has been supplying some amount of this root as a friendly obligation.

Faced like many other areas with a difficult and almost impossible situation, the authorities of this State took a most momentous resolve and introduced in February last State-wide rationing, comprising urban and rural areas and with a basic uniform ration for all. I do not know if a similar experiment has been made in any other area and in any case it is worth studying and watching. As I noticed at Travancore, rationing in urban areas alone tends to make the position of the rural population worse than if no rationing were in existence in any area as the available supplies are forcibly diverted to the rationed towns. It also produces an unhealthy influx into the towns. Quilon's population has increased by 30,000 in this year. The authorities in British Ind'a are toying with the idea that they can escape public outcry by rationing the towns and leaving the dumb rural masses alone. By demonstrating that rural rationing is not impossible in Indian conditions, Cochin is rendering an incalculable service. It may, of course, be argued, that what is possible in a small State like Cochin may not be possible in a larger area. This is sheer mental laziness. The cost of organization and supervision should be much cheaper in a bigger area than in a smaller one. Let us, therefore, look a little closely at Cochin's brave experiment.

Foodgrains are distributed through 135 Fair Price shops conducted directly by the State and 1,300 retailers licensed by the authorities. All these retail distribution centres are supplied by central depots run by the State at convenient centres. Local paddy is systematically requisitioned

and distributed as paddy through the nearest shops. Imported rice is sent in addition whenever it is available in such proportion as the stock permits. The retail price is the same all over the State though it is nearly 50 per cent higher than at Madras. At first the standard ration was fixed at 12 oz. per day per adult of which 8 oz. was to be rice or its equivalent paddy. But this could not be maintained and the present ration is 32 oz. of rice, 24 oz. of wheat and 12 oz. of *bajra* per adult for eight days. This is obviously an insufficient ration, but it is universally recognized that it is not the fault of the State authorities that a larger ration could not be issued. It was also a matter of pleasant surprise to hear from almost everyone that the black market was noticeably less in Cochin than in the neighbouring State of Travancore. In many of the rationing depots, I found that the wheat and *bajra* rations were not being fully taken up, which indicated that many families preferred to suffer rather than eat unfamiliar food. At the central depot at Trichur, I found only two days' stock of paddy and rice, while there was a stock of 8,000 bags of wheat of which only 25 bags were needed daily. At the co-operative stores at Mattancheri, some bags of *bajra* had been lying unsold for months. It is time the Government of India realized that they should send millets to other areas accustomed to them and not force them on Cochin and Travancore.

It should not, however, be imagined that the rationing scheme in Cochin is working smoothly. So far as the machinery is concerned, it is reasonably successful but it has no adequate stock of rice and paddy. The Commissioner of Civil Supplies told me that they had only a few days' stock at a time and it was a terrible strain to shift continuously stocks from one central depot to another to see the system does not break down. As the quota supplied by the Central Government has been coming from Sind, shipping delays constitute an uncertain factor and if, as feared, the local harvest proves to be poor, the rice ration may have to be decreased still further. I was told that if a lump stock of 20,000 tons of rice could be given for reserve besides a monthly quota of six or seven thousand tons, the rationing scheme would work smoothly. At present, as a young wag said to me the scheme is good and equitable, but the availability, the quantity and the quality of the ration is perpetually in doubt. At least for the sake of the experiment which Cochin is making, the Government of India should see its way to give the required stock which after all is a flea-bite in the all-India total.

State-wide rationing has produced a rather comic problem. The householder could not be expected to dole out the usual handful of rice to the beggar and the position of beggars is becoming precarious. Able-bodied beggars have moved into the neighbouring areas, but there are many decrepits and destitutes who have to be provided for, and I understood that the public as well as the authorities were thinking about this question. It would be a great thing if the Government of Cochin would tackle this problem as boldly as it has done that of rationing, abolish begging within the State and establish

poor houses for those who cannot work. In the matter of recruitment to the army and labour force, Cochin has done even better than Travancore and it is estimated that the people of the State may be getting a remittance of one crore of rupees a year from this source alone. Coconut is selling at high prices and the very inability to buy sufficient rice is making for monetary plenty in the State. There should be, therefore, no difficulty in levying a poor rate and getting rid of beggars once for all.

## XX

### MALABAR'S ORDEAL

#### THE NEED FOR ORPHANAGES

Malabar has just emerged from a terrible ordeal. During the monsoon months of June, July and August, the district was attacked by a cholera epidemic of unprecedented severity. The total death-roll is said to have been in the neighbourhood of 30,000, a figure comparable to casualties in war. The three taluqs of Calicut, Ernad and I-onnani suffered most and the town of Calicut reported during the worst days of the epidemic a daily death-roll of 50 and over. The epidemic appeared during a period of acute food scarcity and the poorer classes were mainly affected. Travancore and Cochin were also attacked, but not so severely. It is natural that in the mind of the people the two should be connected and the cholera should be attributed to the scarcity of food. As, however, the epidemic was not confined to these scarcity areas and spread even to such districts as Tanjore, where there has been no scarcity of food, the primary cause of the epidemic should be sought in some sources of infection. But inadequate food tends to lessen the power of resistance and the attempt to fill up the void in the stomach with unaccustomed roots and vegetables causes digestive troubles, thereby intensifying the severity of the epidemic. Thus a satisfactory solution of the food problem is essential if a recurrence is to be avoided during the same months next year. Many relief agencies bravely tried to cope with the distress. The Servants of India Society through Sri V. R. Nayanar, the Ramakrishna Mission, the Communist Party and the Malabar District Relief Committee, started under official patronage with the Chairman of the Calicut Municipality as President, rendered much service to the patients by rendering medical aid, distributing food and clothing, etc. Besides these the Gram Seva Sangh, an organization started mainly by Congressmen outside jail and their sympathizers to carry on the non-political constructive work of the Congress, set up its own Cholera Relief Committee, established as many as 118 relief centres and treated over 9,000 patients.

Cholera has now largely subsided though it has not disappeared altogether. But it will take many years to repair its ravages. Many children have been made orphans. The bread-winners of many families are dead. I saw two of the cholera-stricken homes in a village five miles from Tellicherry. In one, a weak and sickly child, obviously starving, was carrying a smaller child looking no healthier. Their father was dead and though the mother had escaped, she was continuously ailing. The family was living on some rice given free by the local food committee. In another family two adult men and one adult woman had died leaving numerous dependents. There should be thousands of such cases and proper arrangements for giving relief to them have yet to be made. I learnt

that Sri Nayanar of the Servants of India Society has been evolving a plan of a series of orphanages and had already started one at Thanur. The Gram Seva Sangh also has a similar plan. The Collector of Malabar told me that he was also closely watching the situation and at the proper time Government will step in to help the destitutes. It is to be hoped that public assistance will be generously forthcoming for this purpose. I was distressed to hear that the distrust between the officials and Congressmen should have prevented co-operation even in this humanitarian work. Though the work of the Gram Seva Sangh was not interfered with, I learnt that in such matters as facilities for getting rice, etc., official assistance was not forthcoming.

Malabar is a deficit district and used to get its rice from Coconada and other places. At present free movement between districts has been prohibited and the Provincial Government has taken over the task of buying from the surplus districts and supplying the deficit districts. Owing to this change-over and the general panic which has been prevailing everywhere Malabar could not get its full quota and suffering was acute till recently. Tapioca cultivation is not so prevalent in Malabar as in Travancore and many taluqs of the district especially North Malabar are abjectly dependent on imported rice. The Government have established an unofficial system of distribution in recent months. So far as rice brought from outside is concerned the control is fairly complete. Wholesale merchants get stocks under permits and have to sell to retail merchants in prescribed quantities to be sold at fixed prices. These quantities are allotted by the officials according to their estimate of the needs of each town and taluq. In the distribution of these allotments to families in the rural areas non-official Food Committees are allowed to help. As a matter of fact, the towns get the major portion of the imported stocks. In Calicut for instance, a ration of one lb. per adult is being given and ample stocks are stored for the purpose. A co-operative store had three months' stock and I was told private licensed retailers had usually one month's stock. On the other hand, only 12 bags of rice per week were allotted to 160 houses containing 1,020 people in a village near Tellicherry. This works out at four ozs. per head. I saw also Coorg paddy being sold to poor villages at a price nearly 25 per cent higher than the price of rice supplied to the towns. Just now, the first crop has been harvested and the rural folk may not be in a very bad state. But it will last only three or four months and even during these months there is no guarantee that local paddy will be available to the poor at reasonable prices. Though the movement and sale of local paddy, except under licence is prohibited, there is nothing to prevent producers from selling at high prices and the allowance of a nominal ration to the villagers helps the local market. This is seen in grotesque fashion in Palghat, which is a surplus taluq. No rice is supplied to the town or taluq from outside and local producers are not forced to sell at any controlled price. Stocks disappear underground and the people of Palghat have to buy at double the price at which it is selling at

Calicut. To go by mere consideration of the general production of an area is to forget the economic system under which we are living. The producer of food who is hard hit by the high prices of everything he has to buy, naturally wants to get the maximum price for his grain whether in the open or the black market.

The only sure way of making the grain available to his neighbour is to take it from him at a reasonable price. Officials, dismayed with the prospect of the Himalayan labour involved in ensuring secure food supply to all, are playing with the idea that some areas are surplus and others are deficit. The simple truth is that in this crisis every poor family is faced with the same difficulty in every area. What is not supplied at a controlled price has to be obtained at fancy prices from those who have perfected the machinery of hoarding and selling in defiance of all laws and officials. The Madras Government have decided to introduce statutory rationing in the towns of Calicut, Tellicherry and Cannanore. I am not sure that this will not result in even greater neglect of the rural population for official prestige will be involved in any failure of supply to these towns. To a query why he should not advocate the introduction of district-wide rationing as in Cochin, the Collector of Malabar said that Cochin was hardly more than a taluq of his and that he understood that the ordinary work of the Cochin officials was getting into arrears on account of the heavy work involved in such rationing. This is the typical official attitude. Ordinary routine work is his main concern and every other issue is a botheration to be shelved if possible and to be minimized to the smallest extent when shelving is impossible.

## XXI

### FOOD SITUATION IN MADRAS

#### PLEA FOR COMPLETE REVERSAL OF POLICY

The loss of Burma has affected the Province of Madras perhaps more than any other part of India. In normal years there was a deficit of nearly one million tons of rice. Though this might appear to be a small fraction of the annual production of the province, which has 10 million acres under rice and 15 million acres under dry grains and pulses, it was sufficiently large to turn the scale between sufficiency and scarcity. Since the great depression of 1930, the land-holders and ryots have been crying themselves hoarse for some protection which would have enabled the province to become self-sufficient in food. But the Government of India refused to listen to any such proposals, though they were frequently ready to give protection for wheat. The folly of this policy is now apparent. Today the province contains many areas in which there is actual famine and others in which great scarcity prevails. During the Congress Ministry, a committee was appointed to revise the Madras Famine Relief Code and it made valuable recommendations. Though the Congress Ministry had resigned before the recommendations could be adopted, the Adviser Government which succeeded had fortunately the good sense to accept them, and, as a result, relief on a very large scale is being given in the Ceded Districts which constitutes a chronic famine area of the province. In the other parts of the province there are yet no conditions which can be actually called famine, but in many parts of Malabar, Coimbatore, Salem and Chittoor districts acute scarcity prevails, causing anxiety to the Government and the people alike.

The general policy adopted by the Government of Madras may briefly be summed up under the heads of (1) Government purchase of grain from surplus districts and distribution to deficit areas, (2) Prevention of export of grains from deficit areas, and (3) Introduction of statutory rationing in towns, specially in the deficit districts. The consequences of each of these policies deserve to be dealt with in some detail.

At first the Madras Government tried to use the agency of wholesale merchants by a system of licensing and permits. The wholesale merchants in surplus areas were given permits to purchase and stock and sell to wholesale merchants in consuming areas who had similar permits to sell to retail dealers in their area. Though no direct price control was enforced, it was sought to be imposed indirectly by bringing pressure on these permit-holders. It was soon found, however, that this indirect method was not effective and that the wholesale merchants were hoarding and speculating. So the Government have now generally undertaken to make direct purchases at prescribed prices and supply to the deficit areas. The agency of the wholesale merchants is still retained, but merely as agents for holding, dispatching, and distributing stocks on behalf of the Government. This method has been successful to the extent that the price of rice sold



through licensed shops has been stabilized throughout the province round Rs. 20 per bag of two maunds. But it has produced two serious anomalies. In the surplus districts the machinery for purchasing is so slow that many producers find it difficult to dispose of their produce at Government prices and are forced to part with it at reduced prices to licensed wholesale merchants or bribe the officials. The lack of proper godowns is a serious handicap. On the other hand, the locally produced grain in the deficit districts becomes a sort of black market and is sold at prices far higher than that paid for imported stock. As most of the imported stock is sold in urban areas the rural population who are also generally poorer have to pay very high prices for the local grain. Except in one district, millets are consumed locally, and as their prices are not controlled they are often higher than that of rice.

By preventing the export of grains from the deficit districts, the Madras Government seek to conserve local supplies. But in enforcing this policy vexatious restrictions are imposed, even to the extent of preventing movements from taluk to taluk, and minor officials have got almost unlimited opportunities for harassing people. If this control were exercised by the officials in co-operation with popular and representative committees, it might have been productive of much good, but at present it is difficult to say whether the good or the evil predominates. It cannot also be emphasized too much that to prevent the local grain from being exported is not to make it available to the needy. The producer, secure in his knowledge that his neighbours cannot hope to get much from outside, tends to hold on till out of sheer necessity the others are forced to pay abnormal prices.

Like every other bureaucratic Government, the Madras Government also tried to postpone the day of undertaking rationing. A few months ago owing to some transport difficulties, consignments to Madras did not arrive properly for two weeks and panic began to spread and the rice merchants reaped a golden harvest. But it has now been finally adopted as a policy to introduce rationing in rice and other foodgrains in selected towns to start with, and to extend the scheme to every urban area where it may be necessary. Rationing began in the city of Madras in the first week of October and by all accounts it has been successful. This is primarily due to the elimination of wholesale merchants and the existence of ample stocks. The rice is issued from Government Central Depots to specially opened ration depots and licensed retailers, and sold at fixed prices. The present ration of just over a lb. is ample except in the case of persons doing heavy manual work. I have even reasons to think that so far as the middle classes are concerned it is excessive, and as these classes generally eat raw rice, the ration in raw rice may be reduced to 12 oz. I was informed that the policy is to keep at least six weeks' stock, and if this is done there is no doubt that rationing in the city of Madras will give rise to no difficulty. The only difficulty today is about standardizing the quality. In all the railway stations of the Tanjore district which supplies the boiled rice for Madras, I saw thousands of bags of paddy and rice stocked in the open and exposed to rain and sun. In such circumstances, the quality must vary widely as this variation is generally due to the manner in which the rice is stored

at both ends. If rationing on a wide scale is to be undertaken, proper godowns ~~is~~ producing and consuming centres are indispensable and a bold policy ~~is~~ required in this matter. The problem can be attacked in two ways. In interior areas far away from railway lines, Government godowns should be built. The present storage facilities near the railway stations should also be generously extended, the Provincial Government paying some part of the capital or guaranteeing a minimum interest. I feel that the creation of storage facilities is the foundation of a proper food policy during the war and a planned marketing policy in the post-war period.

Rationing in towns is good and necessary but it may lead to a greater neglect of the rural population whose misery will hardly find its way to public attention. In their anxiety to make urban rationing a success, the Governments will be forced to take and keep large stocks which are urgently needed by the village folk. To leave the villager to the off chance of getting some crumbs after the townsfolk have been satisfied is to play the ostrich. It may force the villagers to migrate to the towns and create difficult problem of health and sanitation. It may even drive them to show their wrath in immemorial fashion by rioting. The way of silencing criticism by attending to those who are able to speak for themselves may be easy and natural, but to neglect the dumb rural masses is neither human nor even wise. Readiness to resort to rationing in rural areas on the same basis as in towns is the only security against trouble and injustice. By spending about a lakh of rupees a day in the famine areas and by operating the methods of control indicated above, the Madras Government have so far staved off actual starvation, and they deserve credit for it. But I am afraid they have hard days ahead.

I have no desire to be a prophet of gloom, but I understand that the rains have been insufficient in many dry areas and untimely rains have disturbed manuring and cultivation in irrigated areas. If, unfortunately, there should be less than a normal harvest in 1944, there will be great distress and trouble. It is not too early to plan on a new and vast scale. It is a formidable task which can only be neglected at the cost of seeing repeated in Madras the present disgraceful conditions of Bengal. The British Government have, through Bengal, been forewarned in respect of what can very conceivably happen to other large parts of India. To say the least of it, the present administration in India has failed completely to cope with internal war-time needs and problems. Its very self-confidence has proved to be its undoing. Economic bungling is the direct result of political bungling. The worst feature of the situation is that the Governments here are friendless. The only course now open to the British Government, whose ultimate and immediate responsibility is happily now being conceded by the British Press at any rate, is a complete reversal of policy. My fear is that the British Government are too far away from the scene to perceive this, and the late Viceroy, Lord Linlithgow, will hardly be a sure guide to his countrymen. The persons whom the problem affects most are Lord Louis Mountbatten, Sir Archibald Wavell and General Sir Claude Auchinleck who have grave and immediate duties to discharge.

## XXII

### CONCLUSIONS

#### EQUAL TREATMENT FOR TOWN AND VILLAGE

I have tried, in the previous articles, to give a picture of conditions in some parts of the country where the food situation is critical. There are many other parts of India where similar conditions are bound to exist in some degree. But there is no need for an exhaustive study of all of them to come to general conclusions. Also the situation is so urgent that quick action, rather than elaborate analysis, is the need of the hour. The areas I have visited have been so representative that I am emboldened to present my conclusions as capable of general application all over the country. These are meant to meet the present emergency and I deliberately refrain from dealing with the long range causes that make famine possible and the long range remedies required to eliminate them such as reorganization of agriculture, reform of land tenures and economic planning.

In Bengal and particularly in Orissa the distress is due only to a small extent to natural calamity but to a great deal to the breakdown of the distributive organization. This can happen anywhere in India and if prompt action is not taken to evolve a coherent all-India policy the crisis next year may be of far greater dimensions. The harvest will be gathered in many parts of India during the next three months and this may ease the situation temporarily. This fact is, to my mind, the greatest danger of the present situation. If the Central and Provincial Governments go back to their attitude of self-complacency on account of this temporary change for the better, the crisis will reappear next year with added intensity. This year it began in August. In 1944, it is likely to appear in June or July. One of the consequences of the famine in Bengal is bound to be the increase in anxiety on the part of every householder in India to get enough of the next crop to get through the year. No paper price control can relieve the anxiety or the black market which it will create. It is only the certainty that the Governments all over the country are in a position to ensure ordered supply throughout 1944 that will have a sobering effect.

There are many who feel that if only free trade had been maintained all the time throughout India, everything would have been well. There is something to be said for that view. But free trade depends on free transport and when the Government of India failed to establish a locomotive factory and sent away existing locomotives and wagons to other theatres of war, they destroyed the possibility of free transport. Free trade being out of the question, the only other alternative is intelligent control. Economic operations, no more than physiological operations, cannot be done haphazardly and piecemeal. If it is not thorough, the wound will become septic and the patient may die. Therefore, the only intelligent principle that can be adopted is that every person in India who does not own or cultivate land enough to supply the needs of his family

should be assured of supply of foodgrain at a reasonable rate from a Government or Government-controlled shop. In other words rationing for all except owners and cultivators of land should be established all over India. Is this possible? I have shown how they have done it in Cochin and how in Travancore they are trying to do it. The section of the population which will be exempted on the ground of possession or cultivation of land will constitute the majority of the people and in actual practice, provision may have to be made only for about 100 millions. Even then it is a formidable task but I suggest there is no other way.

Urban rationing has been adopted as a general policy but its implications on rural people have not been realized. Artisans, landless labourers and others who do not own or cultivate land buy their requirements from the shops in the nearest town and if private trade in grain disappears as a result of rationing, these classes will have to migrate to the towns, resort to the black market or become destitute. In Travancore, in Bengal and Orissa, I have seen that poor village folk have to pay more for their grain near towns where there is some sort of rationing. In the city of Madras, they have had to extend the rationing zone to an area beyond the Municipal limits. To some extent the cry of the rural masses may be neglected but the sure result will be that at the most unexpected moment the experience of Bengal will be repeated. When it is remembered that all Europe including Russia is rationed not only in foodgrains but in many other commodities, it should not be difficult to ration foodgrains to a hundred million people. In my articles, I have tried to bring out the growing scarcity of clothing. I have no doubt that considerable quantities of standard cloth have disappeared in the black market and it is bound to happen so long as the consumers are not rationed. As cloth has to be distributed in India only once or twice a year, I feel it is necessary that the Government should undertake to provide every family with a minimum of ordinary clothing at fixed prices, leaving finer varieties to the free market.

As a corollary to the adoption of the principle of rationing to non-cultivating sections of the people, requisitioning on a systematic and legal basis will become necessary. Discretionary purchase and requisitioning have led only to corruption and inadequacy. If one-fourth of the people have to be rationed one-fourth of the grain should be requisitioned. When these two major principles have been accepted, the other measures are comparatively simple. First of all an all-India standard of ration should be adopted. One pound avoirdupois of foodgrain per adult per day is generally accepted as a proper measure but I feel that for the next year this cannot be enforced as no stocks have been built up. If 12 ozs. are taken to be the standard of rationing for foodgrain, it may pull the country through next year. In many parts this quantity will be considered as sufficient and the balance can easily be made up of roots, coconuts, plantains, etc.

The next step is that the Central Government should get enough stock both by imports from abroad and by purchase from surplus pro-

vinces to ensure the minimum standard of rationing to be enforced all over India. Any increase in the ration in any province should be permitted only after this minimum has been satisfied in every province and State. Thirdly, there should not be any privileged class in the matter of food. The crisis in Bengal would not have assumed its present dimensions if it had not been considered that the employees of the Central Government, Railways, Provincial Government and the factories should first be satisfied. In such an elementary matter as food, absolute equality should be established. Otherwise, there will be no tendency to look after the interest of the masses. It should also be considered disgraceful to claim the privilege of being fed at the expense of poorer or less influential fellowmen. If at least in the single article of foodgrain, all from the poorest fisherman to the Viceroy are treated alike, the basis for a new order in India will be laid.

The last but the most important step should be the enlistment of public co-operation. It will be altogether impossible to enforce any all-India scheme without the active support and confidence of the public and the Government should no more hesitate to open the jails and let all public workers free. There is no possibility of their interference in the war effort and they will be ready to co-operate in the solution of the food crisis as they will be the first to be approached by the poor people. Only if there is a general jail delivery, real food committees can be established to help in rationing and requisitioning.

By going to Bengal and trying to render immediate help to the starving, Lord Wavell has made a friendly gesture. But unless it leads to more thorough and profound measures, including political reconciliation, he may find that all the present encomiums showered upon him will only make the ensuing disappointment all the more bitter. I have heard words of unrelieved despair from the lips of many eminent persons during my tour. I have, however, not lost the hope that even out of the present darkness something good will emerge.



The Viceroy, accompanied by Lady Wavell, made an Incognito tour of some of the destitute centres in Calcutta. *The Hindustan Times*, 28-10-1943.

*The accompanying pictures speak for themselves. We are indebted to many newspapers and individuals who have sent us photographs for the book. We have been able to publish only a selection.*

*Our thanks are specially due to the 'People's War,' Bombay, the 'Amrita Bazar Patrika,' the 'Hindustan Standard,' the Cyclone Relief Committee, Contai, the All-India Women's Association, Calcutta, and the Friends' Ambulance Unit, Calcutta.*



Baba! See my children





**We are starving....**



**This Gruel!**

Waiting for the next dole.



Dead in the lap.



leep or Unconscious?

Death So Close To Life





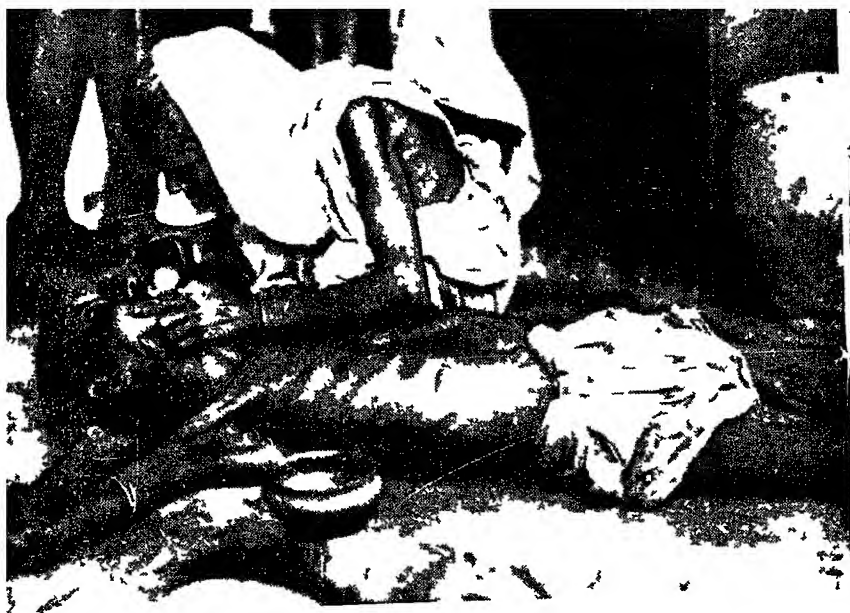
A Party of Destitutes.



One of many at Relief Hospital at Chittagong.

On the Calcutta pavements in sun and rain.

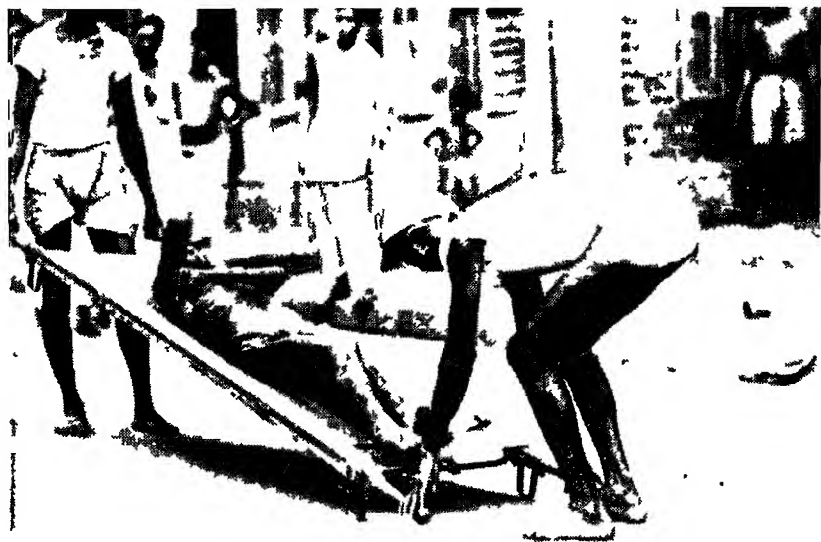




The last cup of misery

Shattered





As naked as he was born.

Food for the vultures







The Hungry Mother With Hungry Children



Mass Feeding....

....At Relief Centres.





**The lucky few . . . .**

**who have been saved.**



## APPENDIX I

- SIR JAGDISH PRASAD'S APPEAL—

*The Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 12-9-1943.

- DR HIRDAY NATH KUNZRU'S

IMPRESSIONS—*The Hindustan Times*, 25 & 30-10-1943.

- MRS VIJAYA LAKSHMI PANDIT'S

PICTURE—*The Hindustan Times*, 7-11-1943.

- MR K. C. NEOGY'S ACCOUNT—

*The Hindustan Times* 3-10-1943

- LEAGUE LEADERS' REPORT—

*The Hindustan Times*, 31-10-1943.



## SIR JAGDISH PRASAD'S APPEAL

### WORST FAMINE IN LIVING MEMORY

Giving his impressions of the conditions prevailing in Faridpur District which he visited recently, Sir Jagdish Prasad, ex-Member of the Viceroy's Executive Council, in a memorandum handed over to the Premier of Bengal, Sir Nazimuddin, said: "At one of the kitchens in Faridpur I noticed a man lapping up food like a dog. I saw abandoned children in the last stages of emaciation; men and women who had been without food for so long that they could now be fed only under strict medical supervision. Dead bodies were being daily picked up; and also those who had fallen by the wayside through sheer exhaustion. A man after vainly wandering for food collapsed on the doorsteps of the Collector's court-room. As the body was being removed, a woman huddled in a corner rushed out with a bundle, and cried: 'Take that also.' It was her dead child. At a kitchen, a woman had been walking every day more than a dozen miles to and from her home to take gruel to her sick and famished husband."

Earlier in his memorandum, Sir Jagdish said: "Bengal is faced with one of the worst famines in living memory." He suggested that the Viceroy and the Members of his Council should visit Bengal and see for themselves how acute was the distress in the province. "Decisions will then be quicker, *communiqués* and explanations less frequent, and constitutional discussions as to the limits of Central and Provincial responsibility irrelevant, the more so when it is realized that with Bengal as a military base of operations against Japan it is urgent that famine conditions should disappear from there as soon as possible," he remarked.

He referred to the criticism that the sufferings of the people of Bengal were being over-dramatized, and suggested to high-placed officials in Delhi who made such criticism to pay a visit to the province of Bengal. "They will then cease to talk platitudes in tones of detachment. The evidence of their eyes will soon convince them that Bengal is faced with one of the worst famines in living memory."

Sir Jagdish made an earnest appeal to all parties and sections of the people that on grounds of humanity they should put aside, for the moment, their differences and combine to save as many lives as possible. He also made a number of suggestions to the Bengal Government regarding relief work.

Sir Jagdish's suggestions were as follows:—

(I) The success of the whole scheme for free kitchens depends on a regular supply of the necessary foodstuffs. Intermittent working of kitchens on account of irregular supplies will cause great suffering. The immediate need is for regular supplies.

(II) The ration laid down in the recent instructions issued by the Bengal Government will only prolong the agony and is insufficient by

itself to save life. The scale of two chattaks of foodgrains (1 chattak—18 lb.) is about one quarter of that laid down in the famine code which crystallizes the experience of many famines. Further, the ration includes foodgrains like *bajra* and *jowar* to which the people of Bengal are unaccustomed and which they do not know how to cook. The scale is in immediate need of revision.

(III) For efficient administration of famine relief on a large scale, the appointment of an administrator of the rank and with the duties corresponding to those of a famine commissioner is essential. Delay is inevitable if references from districts come up to the secretariat through the regular channels. Secretarial and executive functions should not be combined.

(IV) The Surgeon-General and the Public Health Commissioner will be able to advise on the medical side of famine relief. Every kitchen requires a doctor, some medicines and some special foods for hospital cases, especially for children.

(V) If the district officer and his subordinates are to supervise relief operations efficiently, they must be constantly on tour. This means strengthening of staff. It may be possible to utilize pensioners for routine headquarters duties and to recruit for subordinate posts energetic young men.

(VI) In the river districts, if speed-boats could be provided during the navigable season, they will require an adequate supply of coal for their launches.

(VII) Occasional meetings at Government headquarters with selected district officers might be helpful in removing quickly difficulties which are bound to arise in the practical working of a big scheme of relief.

(VIII) Apart from relief to agriculturists, in the river districts relief to fishermen in the shape of new fishing tackle will be necessary.

(IX) I am told that while the price of paddy has been fixed for the cultivator, no restriction has been put on the trader. If this is correct, this defect should be removed.

(X) The famine code has laid stress on the relief of *pardanashin* women and families which cannot take advantage of the commoner forms of relief. Their case should receive adequate attention.

(XI) Milk is urgently required for children. The Government of India should be able to assist in securing supplies of condensed milk from abroad.

(XII) Search parties and stretcher bearer squads have been organized for district headquarters to pick up the dead and those who have collapsed. The organization should be expanded to cover a whole district.

(XIII) It is superfluous to add that a tour of the affected districts by his Excellency the Governor and his Ministers would be of great administrative advantage.

(XIV) It would be interesting to know how departments like the

army, the railways, the port trusts and large employers of labour are able to obtain supplies for their men. On the basis laid down by the Bengal Government for gratuitous relief the Government of India must be using daily foodstuffs which would feed from 16 to 20 million people. Is it not possible for the Bengal Government to copy the methods employed by the army and the railways to secure sufficient supplies for the gratuitous relief of about six million people during the next two months. As I am not in the seat of the Government, I am unable to be more precise. Control rates must be such that Government can obtain its supplies at those rates. If it cannot do so, the rates are mere paper rates—a platitude no doubt but none the less true.



# PANDIT KUNZRU'S IMPRESSIONS

## I. BENGAL

There is incredible misery everywhere. Starvation is the lot of the people both in towns and villages but the rural areas are more seriously affected than the urban areas. The sufferings of the villagers, particularly of women and children, bring tears to one's eyes. Desertion of wives by husbands and of children by their parents is increasing and smaller cultivators and landless labourers are selling their lands and houses in order to have a few rupees to buy food with. There are shops in Narainganj where one can see old corrugated tin sheets which cover the cottages of the village people, sold by starving villagers under the stress of a compelling necessity. These people thus uprooted from their homes and without any resources migrate to the towns in search of food and flock to the gruel kitchens. This seems to me to disprove effectively the charge of hoarding which has often been brought against the cultivator. It is cruel to charge starving villagers with deliberately withholding rice from the markets. I have seen rice on sale in village 'hats' but in very small quantities and its price was nowhere less than Rs. 50 per maund. It was much higher in towns. If the order fixing the price of rice, which has proved ineffective, as experience of the Government of India with regard to the control of price of wheat showed, is withdrawn as it should be, some rice may yet find its way into the local markets. But I have been told, not merely by non-officials but also by such officials as I have had an opportunity of discussing the matter with, that there is no reason to suppose that its quantity will be appreciable.

Destitute homes have been started in several places, for instance, at Dacca, Chandpur and Narainganj, to which people who would otherwise live and die in the streets are removed and emergency hospitals have been opened for destitutes suffering from malaria, dysentery, diarrhoea and other diseases. Yet one comes across dead bodies and emaciated persons wherever one goes. A good proportion of the destitutes in the streets looked like walking corpses. It will be a miracle if they manage to live. The same thing may be said of those who are being looked after in the destitutes' homes and the emergency hospitals. Mr Amery has denied in the House of Commons that there is a shortage of medical supplies or a "widespread outbreak of disease." Whatever the source of information his statement is completely at variance with the facts. There is a great shortage of medical supplies. Quinine is almost not available and people are falling a prey to all kinds of diseases on account of loss of vitality.

The gruel kitchens run by non-official agencies or by the authorities with the aid of money collected from the public are helpful to a certain extent, but their number is small. They have to be closed down from time to time for want of foodstuffs, and the *kichri* given per head is as a rule about 2 or 2½ chattaks only notwithstanding the decision of the

Government as announced in a Press Note dated September 13 that the scale of foodgrains for preparation of *kichri* should be immediately raised to six chattaks for working adults and expectant and nursing mothers, four chattaks for other adults and two chattaks for children. The destitutes are fed only once a day. We shall, therefore, be deceiving ourselves if we think that they offer any real solution of the problem. I was told at Dacca where foodstuffs are being un-officially rationed by the Dacca Central Relief Committee under the presidentship of the popular Sessions Judge Mr De that only 12 chattaks of rice and 20 chattaks of atta had been distributed per head by the mohalla committees in the course of a month and that there was a shortage everywhere not merely of rice but of other foodstuffs also with the possible exception of some pulses. Besides, the price of any foodgrain was not less than 12 annas per seer at least in any town. This is naturally having its effects on all classes of people, but people belonging to the lower middle class, owing to their inability to beg, are perhaps suffering more terribly than the other classes. Till I came to Bengal I thought that there might be some justification for the complaint that the Bengal Government was being unfailingly attacked by its political opponents who were exaggerating the calamity for their own purposes. But I feel convinced now that the statements made by public men of Bengal represented the bare truth and that they have rendered a service to their province by bringing the true facts to the notice of the Indian and the British public.

I find that the need for cloth is almost as great as for food. At present what is required are *dhotis* and *sarces*, but warm clothing will soon be urgently required and if it is not forthcoming, it can easily be imagined what effects the inclemencies of the weather will have on people already exhausted by starvation.

Mr Amery has repeatedly stated in the House of Commons that the deaths from starvation were only about a thousand a week. I have no hesitation in saying that such a statement amounts to an attempt to conceal the true facts from the British public. My experience has convinced me that the mortality due to scarcity of food is immensely greater.

I was told in a big sub-division that it had been estimated that in that sub-division alone the deaths from starvation amounted to between 750 and 1,000 per week. It is feared that the situation will deteriorate considerably with the approach of winter owing to want of warm clothing. Even in towns the death rate is very high.

Chandpur and Munshiganj reminded me of the horrible conditions prevailing in Contai. I do not want to use strong language, but I think that I would be failing in my duty to Bengal and the country if I did not frankly state the facts as I saw them.

I was frequently asked why all the foodgrains supplied to Bengal by the surplus provinces were being sent to Calcutta and why the waterways were not being used for the despatch of food direct to Eastern Bengal. Members of relief committees indignantly asked me whether the welfare of Calcutta alone was the concern of the Local Government and their districts had ceased to form part of Bengal. These questions

require to be answered by Government.

There may be good reasons for not utilizing waterways to send food direct to Eastern Bengal and starving the districts while feeding Greater Calcutta, which the people are unaware of. If so, it should be clearly stated so that the people may understand why they are being made to suffer.

There is serious anxiety among the people regarding the policy which the Provincial Government will follow in respect of the *aman* crop. They feel and I think rightly that it will be disastrous if the entire crop is purchased by Government. It seems to me to be imperatively necessary that Calcutta and the bigger towns should be rationed as early as possible in accordance with the policy recommended by the last Food Conference, but it will be nothing short of a catastrophe if the Bengal Government or any other Local Government tried in the present state of things to take possession of the entire stock of food within its jurisdiction.

That Bengal is suffering from a famine of almost unprecedented magnitude is an indescribably tragic fact, but I do not think it is due entirely to the failure of the last *aman* crop in some districts or the cessation of imports from Burma. Even if the yield of the *aman* crop fell short of the quantity required by two million tons, as has been stated sometimes by the authorities, 'the distress is out of all proportion to the shortage. I feel, therefore, that the present crisis is to no small extent due to failure or unwillingness of the Bengal Government to recognize the gravity of the situation for a long time and to take comprehensive and resolute measures to deal with the emergency. But while the Bengal Government has signally failed to discharge its duty towards the people of Bengal, the ultimate responsibility for the present catastrophe is that of the British Government and the Government of India. What were they doing when things were going from bad to worse in Bengal? Why were they following what Lord Strabolgi has called in the recent debate in the House of Lords a policy of masterly inactivity in so vital a matter? The reasons given by the Under-Secretary of State in justification of their attitude add insult to injury. Apparently Mr Amery and Lord Linlithgow attached importance to everything but their duty to save millions of human beings from starvation and death.

Mr Amery has made much of the fact that wheat was imported into India in the concluding months of 1942-43. So far as I know the British Government agreed to the importation of only 250,000 tons of wheat and as has now been publicly stated the Government of India after receiving about 150,000 tons came to the conclusion that no more need be imported. The British public has forced the British Government to abandon its previous apathetic attitude but it remains to be seen whether the Indian authorities are still prepared to use the large powers with which the constitution invests them to rescue helpless and suffering Bengal from the disaster which threatens to engulf it. Let no one think that the present troubles will be over as soon as the *aman* crop, which happily promises to be a bumper crop, has been harvested. The upheaval that has taken place in both the towns and villages cannot subside in a few days or weeks. The most strenuous efforts will have to be made to rehabilitate

those who have lost their all and to restore their old sense of self-respect and self-confidence and their pride in honest and hard work. The responsibility of the Central Government is, therefore, much heavier than it seems to think. The future of Bengal depends in no small measure on Lord Wavell.

## II. ORISSA

An idea of the distress prevailing in certain parts of the coastal districts of Orissa was given at a public meeting by Pandit H. N. Kunzru who has just completed a tour of the areas.

Pandit Kunzru said that he was not aware of the seriousness of the situation because the accounts published in the Press about the distress here were not such as to make the outsider think the position was serious anywhere here. They received the news of the recent floods which came on the top of cyclones. Some letters written by friends failed to impress properly the severity of the situation. Only during the last two or three weeks statements had appeared in the Press relating to acute distress. Whether this was due to the rigorous censorship, that was exercised or to the failure of public men to inform other provinces of the reality of the situation, he as an outsider could not say. But those public men in whom he had confidence told him that they were powerless to face the censorship and to let the people of other parts of India know the truth about this province. It was extraordinary, he said, that at a time like this, when the Government of the province should try to enlist public sympathy not only here but in other parts of India also, attempts should have been made here to prevent the rest of India from knowing the sufferings of the people.

He said: "My impression is that while the area in distress is smaller than Bengal, in the affected areas the distress is pretty nearly as acute as in any of the districts of Bengal that I have visited. I confess I have seen fewer corpses here. Nevertheless, I must say that with the exception of Jajpur, wherever I went I found there was scarcely any difference between the sufferings of the people of these areas and the people of Bengal. It seems to me, therefore, that it is the duty of outsiders who are trying to help other parts of India to realize the difficulties of the province which is extremely poor and which frequently suffers from floods and give it the help which she needs badly at present."

Continuing, Pandit Kunzru said: "I don't say that the Government has remained absolutely inactive and callous to the sufferings of the people. Nevertheless, I am bound to say that the situation is more acute than what they have allowed it to be known outside and this is more serious than they seem to imagine." He referred to the manner in which relief centres were organized by the Orissa Merchants' Relief Committee and the Orissa Relief Committee and paid tributes to their work. People urgently required clothing. He found that here as in every part of Bengal, the need for cloth was very great. The conditions of women could not be borne

## MRS. VIJAYA LAKSHMI PANDIT'S PICTURE

### LACK OF MEDICAL AID—BIGGEST DANGER

"It is quite impossible to give a correct picture of what has been happening in Bengal. Acute distress prevails, and hunger and death walk hand in hand and unchecked," said Mrs Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, President, All-India Women's Conference, addressing the Journalists' Association.

Mrs Pandit continued: "The tragedy of the situation lies in the fact that much of the present suffering could have been avoided. For months before the crisis developed, it was well known that there was every possibility of a food shortage in Bengal. No steps were taken to arrange for imported food stocks or to release the stocks already in the province for military use. Rice continued to be exported even after the food shortage had begun."

"Hoarding has been proclaimed as the main reason for the existing conditions and the blame has been laid at the door of the small cultivator. But personally, I think," said Mrs Pandit, "much of the prominence given to this theory of hoarding is due to the desire to direct public attention from the real issue and to show up the Indian as an anti-social animal in the eyes of the world."

She added: "If there has been hoarding in the larger scale, the poor people are certainly not responsible. Actually the burden has fallen the most on the agriculturists. It is these poor people who are flocking in their thousands to seek food in the nearest towns."

Mrs Pandit spoke about the network of free kitchens, milk kitchens and cheap canteens opened in Calcutta to help feed the destitute and provide food at a very reduced rate for the middle classes, whose plight was very pitiable. But she confessed that the food cooked at these kitchens which is in the form of *kichri* is cooked to the consistence of thick gruel and the amount is hardly sufficient to do more than keep some people alive for a little longer period. She said: "A lot has been said about the nutritive value of this sloppy mixture and I have heard people discussing the improved conditions of the destitutes, but I confess it has not been visible to me. One still sees starving men, women and children in various degrees of emaciation lined up in front of the free kitchens waiting for their daily doles. The hospitals tell a sad tale and the morning newspapers give the information of the number of deaths that have taken place during the previous 24 hours."

"In the villages," added Mrs Pandit, "the condition is still worse. As I motored from one place to another I saw bodies recently dead lying by the roadside with vultures and jackals and dogs attacking them. In the interior the sights are ghastly. Some villages had been entirely wiped out and huts stood empty with open doors. Bodies had been left around in the fields or thrown into the canal where they lay rotting. In most places malaria and cholera were taking a heavy daily toll. Hospitals were inadequately staffed and badly equipped—quinine and anti-

MRS. RAJEN NEHRU FOUND IN BENGAL MASSES OF WALKING SKELETONS. VITAMIN 'A' PILLS  
ARE COMING FROM 'LONDON TO TURN THEM TO LIVING MASSES OF FLESH



*The Hindustan Times, 7-11-1943.*

cholera injections and other medicines were not available. In some places subsidized medical practitioners had been sent out by the Government to the affected area, but as is usually the case these men did not identify themselves with the suffering people and were of little use. One of the worst affected areas is the Contai sub-division in the Midnapur district."

"A marked suspicion of anything done by the Government is very noticeable," stressed Mrs Pandit. "This is not entirely without foundation as, so far, Government relief measures have not been very successful. The subsidized relief kitchens are not able to function regularly for want of grain, and private enterprise is not encouraged. A private relief centre which had been catering for over 200 persons daily in Contai town was ordered to stop functioning by the S.D.O. and permission to start a cheap grain shop in the same town refused. There are no arrangements to dispose of the unclaimed dead, and, as I have mentioned, these bodies lay around in various stages of decomposition. The reply received by me when I inquired about this was to the effect that no sweepers were available. And yet volunteers were not allowed to render aid."

"The biggest danger at the moment is lack of medical aid," concluded Mrs Pandit. "Mass cholera inoculations are urgently needed and quinine is a vital necessity, yet delays continue and lives are being lost."

"This grave situation cannot be solved by non-official efforts," observed Mrs Pandit. "The non-official agencies now working in Bengal are all doing wonderful work and are rendering a valuable service in every field. Most deserving of mention are the Ramakrishna Mission and the Marwari Relief Society. Money has been pouring into Bengal from all over India, but what is required is that food and medicines should be rushed to the districts in need and that there should be a system of planned distribution by which the required articles should reach their destination."

"Ordinances cannot help to solve an intricate problem. They generally make matters worse—an atmosphere of goodwill can do more than any forced measures," remarked Mrs Pandit and added: "Until this is forthcoming the problem of Bengal may lack a solution."

## MR NEOGY'S ACCOUNT

### GOVERNMENT UNABLE TO ENSURE SUPPLIES

Of late there have been official announcements of graduated scales of reduction of the price of rice in Bengal with effect from specified dates. The reductions are at best theoretical in value and may serve to impress the outside world, but cannot deceive the people of Bengal. The effect of such spectacular announcements has been the disappearance of rice from the market in most places due particularly to the fact that the announced reductions in the price entail a loss to the retail trader who acquired the stocks at prices higher than that formally permissible under the reduced rate with effect from the specified date. Apart from the actual shortage of supplies, this factor has contributed considerably to the prevalence of abnormally high prices in the black market where supplies are available in small quantities, but in most places such supplies are not available even at black market prices. Bad as the situation is in and around Calcutta, it is many times worse in the interior of the province. Frantic telegrams are being received from every district and every sub-divisional town indicating the acute sufferings even of those people who are in a position to pay for their foodgrains, because hardly any supplies are available. Responsible officials in the districts and sub-divisions are known to have sent appeals to non-official leaders seeking their help in securing supplies. The case of the district towns and countryside is, I am afraid, receiving much less attention at the hands of the higher officials at Calcutta and Delhi as well as in the Press than the situation in and around Calcutta. There is no regular record kept of the cases of death from starvation in the interior; but from reports received now and then, it appears that the death-rate is heavier there than in Calcutta.

The attention of the whole of India has been concentrated more on Calcutta than on rural Bengal, though in the case of Calcutta it is comparatively a small proportion of people (many of whom have come from outside in search of food) who have been starving. Numerous charitable organizations have been functioning in Calcutta for giving relief to the distressed. In the interior, however, by far the larger proportion of people belonging to the middle and lower classes are daily experiencing the pangs of hunger with few charitable organizations to minister to their needs. A number of free gruel kitchens have, no doubt, been opened at different centres, but they are so few and are situated at such great distances that their ability is confined to an extremely small proportion of the suffering people. Due to their location and the personnel of management, all of them cannot be said to be serving the cause of starving humanity irrespective of creed or caste. As an example, I should like to cite the case of my own village which is situated in the Manikganj sub-division of the district of Dacca. It is included in a Union of a cluster of villages which are at this time of the year separated by unfordable sheets of water. It is necessary to mention here that the *aus* crop on which so much of hope was built has been a com-



plete failure in and around my village. This Union of several villages has been given a free gruel kitchen by the Government agency, but the kitchen is located in one of the villages which can be reached by boat from the other villages, and if boats are not available, as they are not in the case of the indigent poor, the distance has to be covered by swimming. The kitchen is located in the house of the President of the Union Board who happens to be a Muslim and who is well known for his competence and is anxious to serve all alike without any communal bias. But the general population of his village is predominantly Muslim, and in spite of the best of his intentions and efforts the benefit of the free kitchen is enjoyed very much more by the Muslim population than by others. Apart from this, the comparative inaccessibility of the village from the other villages constituting the Union does not enable even the Muslim population of the other villages to take full advantage of the kitchen. From a letter which I have received from the President of the Union, it appears that the kitchen is being daily attended by about 1,300 people and he has advised me to open a free kitchen in my own village so that it may feed 500 more of starving people which is almost cent. per cent. of the population of my village. The Government perhaps supply the existing free kitchen with the necessary rations, but I am informed by the President of the Union that rice will have to be purchased locally at the rate of Rs. 50 per maund (as compared with Rs. 24, which is the officially declared price at present) if I decide on opening a kitchen to serve my village, and that a kitchen to supply even the regulation quantity of gruel (which is believed to be insufficient for the purpose of maintaining human life) to 500 people every day would cost about Rs. 125 per day. I am prepared to contribute towards the cost of a free kitchen in my village provided the Government agree to supply the necessary rations at the controlled prices. But the reports that one receives from all quarters go to indicate that the Government are not in a position to ensure supplies in the rural areas where the *aus* crop has been a failure or which have already been denuded of stocks of food-grains by reckless purchases on behalf of Government and food drives carried out in the past.

The supplies that are being rushed from different parts of India to Bengal are all coming to the Calcutta area and most of them are unaccountably getting driven underground, with the result that the distribution of the foodgrains to the different district areas has been extremely meagre. Red tape has also been playing its usual part in delaying such distribution, as the supplies must necessarily come to Calcutta before they can be allocated to different district areas, whereas some portions of Northern and Eastern Bengal could be directly supplied, particularly from certain centres outside Bengal and the bottomless pit of Calcutta avoided. What is required is a planned programme of distribution which has been notoriously wanting up to date. In the result, the people of the countryside must be ready to face continued starvation and ultimate death. No section of the community suffers more than the poorer middle classes for whose relief special measures are needed, but have not been so far taken by Government. They are, as may be expected, suffering in grim silence and facing a lingering but sure extinction.

## LEAGUE LEADERS' REPORT

### A GRUESOME PICTURE OF MISERY

"We are convinced after a study of the situation, that it is not provincial autonomy which is responsible for this catastrophe, but the Government of India and the British Government are by their failure to take timely and suitable action guilty of culpable negligence," observe Nawabzada Liaquat Ali Khan, Honorary Secretary, All-India Muslim League, and Nawab Mohd. Ismail Khan, Chairman, All-India Muslim League Defence Committee, in a joint statement on the Bengal food situation, after a tour of the various parts of the province.

"Mr Amery and other British statesmen," they say, "have been trying to make provincial autonomy responsible to a large extent for Bengal's present trouble, and some of the diehards are making the misery of the people of the province the chief plank in their propaganda against the capacity of Indians to rule themselves. We entirely differ from Mr Amery and others in fixing the responsibility for the present state of affairs in Bengal on the Provincial Government and we greatly deplore this anti-Indian propaganda of the diehards. It is ignoble and certainly not in keeping with the British tradition of sportsmanship and fairplay to make scapegoats of others for their own failings and shortcomings."

"The gruesome picture of misery that stalks the land has left an indelible mark on our memory," says the statement and adds that the distress is "real, widespread and calamitous. The figures given in the Press from time to time of the number of destitutes who are being fed in the gruel kitchens established by the Government or subsidized by charitable associations fall far short of the number actually affected by this catastrophe. These figures do not take into account the lower middle classes who have sold away all that they possess, including their land and houses to feed themselves and their families from black markets and whose self-respect prevents them from making a public exhibition of their destitution." "It is, of course, very difficult," they say, "to give the exact percentage of the population that is suffering from hardship, hunger and starvation. But we surmise, from what we have seen, that at least 20 per cent. of the population is living under most pitiable conditions. Although the Government and public charity are doing their best to cope with the problem of feeding these destitutes, yet, the arrangements made must be considered inadequate in view of the enormous number of the distressed population. The gruel distributed through the relief centres is insufficient to revitalize the condition of the destitutes debilitated by starvation and disease and at the best, it can only keep the demon of death temporarily away from some of them."

Speaking of medical arrangements, the statement says that these are "hopelessly inadequate". Separate wards for destitutes, doctors, nurses, medicines and medicinal food are wanting to the extent they

are needed. Where they do exist there is overcrowding and insufficiency of medical relief of all kinds.

According to the Nawabzada and Nawab Ismail Khan, the prime trouble is the scarcity of foodstuffs and that its supply to the mofussil had been meagre and has been impeded by the lack of transport facilities. In their opinion, every other activity should be temporarily subordinated to this urgent need of importing foodstuffs into Bengal and taking them to the affected areas, and every available means of transport utilized for this purpose.

The statement regrets that there is no uniform policy in the matter of relief by the various district authorities and public support and co-operation is not fully availed of by them. The efficiency of relief measures differs from place to place according to the enthusiasm, sympathy and drive of the head of the district. "We cannot, however, help feeling that if all the officers had approached the problem with sympathy and had shown the drive and energy which the occasion demanded, they would have been able to do more for the people under their charge. They have been so inured to routine, red-tapism, and playing the role of policemen, that they have failed to realize the gravity of the situation, the necessity of initiative and promptitude of action."

## APPENDIX II

- ❑ INDIAN FAMINE RELIEF MEASURES, OLD AND NEW—  
By Kali Charan Ghosh
- ❑ MAHATMA GANDHI'S FORESIGHT
- ❑ SIR PURSHOTAMDAS'S WARNING
- ❑ VILLAGE GRAIN BANKS—By Vaikunth L. Mehta
- ❑ DR SYAMA PRASAD MOOKERJEE'S STATEMENT
- ❑ NON-OFFICIAL RELIEF—By J. R. Symonds
- ❑ APPEAL BY SIR H. P. MODY AND MR N. R. SARKER
- ❑ MR. ARTHUR MOORE URGES RESOLUTE ACTION
- ❑ PROF. MEGHNAD SAHA'S APPEAL
- ❑ "EASTERN ECONOMIST" ON BENGAL FAMINE



## INDIAN FAMINE RELIEF MEASURES OLD AND NEW

*The following article by Mr Kali Charan Ghosh appeared in the November 1949 issue of the "Modern Review":*

From the time the administration of the country was taken up by the East India Company we have records of the several famines that have visited India at different periods of history, and the details of the measures adopted for alleviation of the distress of the people. There is such a close similarity between the different measures adopted by the Government at distant dates since 1770 to 1943 that it is highly interesting and profitable to study them by comparison.

Before going into the details we may be inclined to give an idea of famine relief in the Badshahi Amal—the regime of the Moghul Emperors.

As regards Emperor Shahjehan (Famine in the Bombay Presidency in 1629-30):

"For two successive years the rains failed and the mortality and depopulation caused thereby were very great. The Emperor Shahjehan was then at Burhanpur.....He ordered poor houses to be opened at Burhanpur, Surat and Ahmedabad for the relief of the famished, and food and money distributed. All taxes were remitted for two years."

Next we come to Emperor Aurangzebe (Report of past famine in the N.W. Provinces by Girdlestone)—Famine in 1661:

"Aurangzebe personally superintended the relief of his subjects, one of his plans being to bring grain on a large scale from Bengal and the Punjab.....Several things tend to prove that the calamity was severe. The Emperor opened his treasury and granted money without stint. He gave every encouragement to the importation of corn and either sold it at reduced prices or distributed it gratuitously amongst those who were too poor to pay. He also promptly acknowledged the necessity of remitting the rents of his cultivators and relieved them for the time being from the burden of other taxes. The vernacular chronicles of the period attribute the salvation of millions of lives, and the preservation of many provinces, to his strenuous exertions."

The early British rule was visited by one of the worst famines in history, known as "Bengal Famine of 1770":

"In November the Collector General saw an alarming prospect of the Province becoming desolate and the Government wrote home (23rd November) to the Court of Directors in the most alarming terms."

With what effect:

"They resolved to lay up a six months' store of grain for their troops.....In 1770, the distress was acutest in Bihar; efforts were

made, not very successfully to obtain grain from the British Officers at Allahabad and Fyzabad."

In 1943 we go to the Governors' Provinces (Section 93 Provinces as they are called) almost with the same result. There is store for the Army, the Port Trust, Railways and men of other Essential Services, i.e., factory labourers, etc.

The report says:

"But it is probable that private trade was active."

We have on Mr Hunter's authority:

"The whole administration was accused of dealing in grain for their private advantage. It was in vain that the Court of Directors wrote one indignant letter after another demanding the names of the culprits"

The Court of Directors had also to write about "the corruption and rapacity of our servants....."

Is not history repeating itself in 1943? If you want to be convinced of the grain trade between the several Provincial Governments with the Government of India at the top, please go through the proceedings and speeches of the members of the Central Legislature, the statements of the Ministers of the Provinces, particularly emanating from the Ministers of the Punjab. As late as September 4, said Sardar Baldev Singh, Development Minister:

"In spite of our strong protest, no action seems to have been taken up to now to check some of the Provincial Governments from making profit at the expense of the Punjab growers and their (Provincial Governments') starving population."

Compare the Government circular issued during the famine of 1783 with that of the present Minister for Civil Supplies, Bengal.

In 1783:—

"We direct that you do in the most public manner issue orders by beat of tom-tom, in all the bazaars and gunges in the district under your charge, declaring that if any merchant shall conceal his grain, refuse to bring it to market and sell it at a reasonable price, he will not only be punished himself in the most exemplary manner, but his grain will be seized and distributed among the poor."

Says the Bengal Minister on 7th May 1943:—

"I have already warned all hoarders including the agriculturist hoarders that if they do not bring their stock on to the market, they will lose in the long run. I am determined to use all the powers of the Government to see.....that these hoards are disgorged, and preliminary steps, which these gentlemen may find drastic, have already been taken.....I am giving a chance to the people to do it voluntarily, while I perfect my plans to make them disgorge the hoards. If they do not listen to my warning, let them not think that they can run their hoards underground or that they will be able to succeed in dissipating the hoards."

There were several other announcements, etc., on this subject threatening ultimate freezing of the concealed stock.

Over-confidence in the stock of the province, disregard of the signs of scarcity and thorough unpreparedness for a coming scarcity or actual famine have been the cause of death of hundreds of lives in India. Emasculation of the people, dislocation of economic order, disruption of society and deaths from diseases coming in the trails of the famine have retarded the progress of India by centuries. During 1865 the timely warning of the Collectors of various districts in Orissa of failure of crop and suggestions for remission of taxes were met with sharp rebuke from the Government of Bengal and the Board of Revenue. Says the Famine Commission of 1873:—

"In November and December more and more urgent reports were sent up from Puri, in which district the famine first declared itself, of the extreme distress of the people and of the prevalence of deaths from starvation.....By the end of January, prices had gone up near or at which rate they stood till the end of March. The necessity of importation was earnestly pressed on the Board at this time (March), but in vain.....In February, distress began to show itself acutely taking the form of an influx of starving people into the headquarter town, and an outbreak of grain robberies. But the extent of the impending calamity was still far from realized."

In April the conscience of the munificent public in different towns, particularly in Calcutta, was roused to the gravity of the situation and relief committees were formed to take steps for mitigating the distress, "but the Board of Revenue still doubted whether there was any really great deficiency of food or any necessity for Government to interfere for any new measures."

In May it was clear that money was of no avail. "We want rice" was the cry of the Commissioner. "Rice required for the troops, the prisoners and the Government establishments could no longer be procured."

In 1943, barring that sufficient store is being held for the troops, the prisoners and members of the essential services, no other provisions to meet the exigencies of the situation have been made. There was a sense of sufficiency in the minds of the Ministers and we find that the Civil Supplies Member, Bengal, "did not wish," on May 30, "to say that there was not enough rice in Bengal or that enough rice would not be coming from outside." Earlier than that, on May 8, he said that "there was sufficiency of foodgrains for the people of Bengal." On April 29, speaking of the seriousness of the food situation, Mr A. K. Fazlul Huq, an ex-Premier of Bengal, said:—

"It had been reported to him by an officer on his return from tour that a man had died, and on post-mortem examination grass was found in his stomach—he could not digest it."

The situation had already become very serious, but the Ministers "still doubted whether there was any really great deficiency of food." On May 8 it was told that "the solution was in sight" and the Finance Minister said on the very next day that "in a short time the situation will greatly improve." There were some efforts in inducing the Transport Member of the Government of India to make arrange-



ments for flow of foodgrains to Bengal to which he replied on May 19 that "he would do everything in his power to facilitate the movement of foodstuffs from other provinces to Bengal." Then the Ministers or Advisers, as the case may be, were approached. No sooner had the Bengal Minister expressed satisfaction on the result of such interviews, the public were regaled on the very next day by statements from responsible Ministers and Advisers opposing such arrangement. Giving out his mind on the Government of India order creating an Eastern Zone of Free Trade, Sir Md. Saadulla said:—

"I have been compelled to lodge a dignified and vigorous protest with the Central Government" and "I appeal to our traders and also to our growers not to export rice and paddy for temporary gain."

The Bengal Government in its helplessness devised their province-wide food drive to be launched on June 7 and "the Bengal Foodgrains Inquiries and Control Order" was published on June 4 providing that "an authorized officer may, together with such persons as he may consider necessary, enter upon any premises where he has reason to believe that foodgrains have been stocked, etc.," and an Ordinance was passed to the effect "that any matter intended or likely to incite opposition to, or non-participation in measures to be taken in Bengal to prevent, detect or deal with hoarding and hoarders of foodgrains shall, before publication be submitted for scrutiny to the Press Adviser." The feasibility of such a measure was doubted, but the people willingly submitted to such province-wide search in the hope of getting rice at a reasonable price. On June 30, at New Delhi, the Civil Supplies Minister "expressed satisfaction at the result of the food (anti-hoarding) drive." But on July 12, in the Bengal Assembly, he was forced to say "that the general picture that he might present to the House was that practically in all places deficits have been reported."

His boss in the India Office said on July 14, in the House of Commons:—

"The present difficult situation in India was due to the widespread tendency of cultivators to withhold foodgrains from the market, to larger consumption per head as a result of increased family income, and to hoarding by consumers and others."

Before passing on to other details the general condition of the people in August 1866 may profitably be compared with that of 1943. Says the report:—

"The mortality was highest in August, consequent on the heavy storms of rain. The people were then in the lowest stage of exhaustion; the emaciated crowds collected at the feeding stations and had no sufficient shelter, and the cold and wet seem to have killed them in fearful numbers."

To come to 1943 again, we find that while the Ministers were speaking of sufficiency and making no serious efforts to check the impending famine, the people at this time have been passing through great stress due to high prices of rice and other necessities of life. On July 3 (1943) "the District Magistrate declared a serious shortage

of rice at Chittagong," and in a message dated July 14, delayed in transmission, the Bar Association and the President of the different Union Boards wired to the authorities "informing them of a horrible state of famine" in Bhola (Barisal). Pictures of acute distress in districts began pouring in from every part of Bengal at this time.

The leaders of the people and the nationalist Press have been clamouring for a long time against export of rice, which remained unheeded till July 23 when "all exports of rice from India was stopped." It reminds me of past objections to exports of rice from India when famine conditions prevailed in the country. During the famine in Bengal in 1873-74 Sir George Campbell, then Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, wrote to the Viceroy on October 22, 1873, "that exportation of rice from India to foreign countries might be stopped." He further said that "if there was a general failure in Bengal all that India and Burma could supply would go but a little way to fill up the vacuum." The Viceroy objected to this proposal, to which the Secretary of State concurred. The grounds of objection are still the same as before. The Indian coolies abroad needed rice and "it would have been unjust to stop the supply of the usual food of the Bengal coolies in the Colonies." The other objection was that the people would eat more rice if export is stopped when it is known that "lowered consumption is the greatest safeguard against famine."

Export of rice, according to the Government of India, has to be made (15-7-1943)

"In the interests of Indian labouring population" in Ceylon and elsewhere and "of the maintenance of production of vital war supplies."

Our attention is drawn to (15-3-1942)

"The important problem of keeping India's fighting forces fully supplied with the best of food in order to sustain their health and spirits."

We have also to remember (1-2-1942) that

"India, particularly suited to meet the requirements of the Empire and the various theatres of war in the Middle East and elsewhere, has harnessed all its available resources to maintain a regular food supply in sufficient quantity and of desired standard quality for the Defence forces in the country and abroad."

The policy enunciated above was followed till July 23, 1943, with the following result:

Export of grain, pulse and flour from India:

Year					Rs
1939-40	..	•	..	..	5,08,82,988
1940-41	..	..	..	..	5,91,47,381
1941-42	..	..	..	..	10,42,64,211
1942-43	..	..	..	..	6,95,49,014

We have no separate figures for rice, but export of foodgrains in very large quantities during continued scarcity (may be due to failure

of imports) is bound "to create a vacuum which it is difficult to fill up" by statements, proclamations and ordinances.

I have had no idea that the "Eat Less" slogan is not an original idea with the Bengal Civil Supplies Minister but that it is a mere paraphrase of the statement of a Secretary of State for India in 1873-74 which, as has been stated before, says "lowered consumption is the greatest safeguard against famine."

I do not know if the people of Bengal have not been living barely on lowered consumption for the last two years and his advice "Eat Less" and "to get themselves habituated to substitute food as far as possible" tendered on August 4 is a mere waste of Ministerial, and hence, costly breath. When people do not get food, they try to subsist on whatever they can get, not to speak of "substitute food." This is famine even if the Ministers refuse to call it one.

Price of goods was controlled with no effect whatsoever on the market. The Premier of Bengal, on May 23, "had no doubt that the prices of foodstuffs would be brought to a reasonable level within a short time."

The Department of Civil Supplies Press Note said on June 4:

"There is every reason to believe that prices have reached their peak" and again "there is ground for solid confidence that prices will begin to fall."

On August 1 Mr Suhrawardy thundered forth:

"I wish to take this opportunity of warning the trade that a scheme for controlling prices throughout Bengal will shortly be put in operation... Most vigorous steps will be taken by Government to ensure that these controlled prices are maintained."

The prices are soaring high in thorough disregard of Governmental threats, and "controlled" commodities have disappeared from the market. There is a black market for the rich, and even the dead remembers that it exists, but our Civil Supplies Minister, when asked at a Press conference on September 1, said he was not aware of its existence either officially or non-officially. To those who were with hoarding stocks he had given a stern warning. Bravo!

In July when the situation became critical and people began to wander about for food, the Civil Supplies Minister announced in the Bengal Council about starting of gruel kitchens in different parts of Chittagong. With regards to the beggars he said:

"They can be looked after by the charitably disposed people here."

But in fact these charitably disposed people have been looking after a large number of these wanderers even long before the Ministers have had any idea about it. This is a form of indirect taxation which the Government wilfully encouraged.

In spite of all tall talks of tackling the problem successfully people began to die on the streets and dead bodies remained there for days without anybody to take care of them. On August 3, the Commissioner of Police, Calcutta, announced an arrangement "for removing dead bodies off the streets of Calcutta to the morgues with the

minimum of delay." Between the period August 13 to 17, 120 dead bodies were removed from the streets and 127 persons were removed to improvised hospitals on August 16 and 17. The figures have mounted up and daily deaths in these improvised hospitals are numerous. Pathetic tales have been pouring in from the districts, where rice is not available in the markets and people in all classes of society are dying in most tragic circumstances. The tale of the famine of 1770 is being repeated in its minutest details in Bengal and every human being in the province has witnessed some of these with their own eyes and every description will fall short of the actual picture.

The Famine Commission of 1878 censured the Government of Bengal and the Revenue Board for failing to take notice of the signs of famine in time. The Revenue Board "unreservedly admitted":

"To be at all largely effectual, it was necessary that the discovery of the full truth should be made, and very extensive measures adopted, many months before the actual outburst of unmistakable famine occurred."

During the famine "money was of little use, for it could not be exchanged for food." They also admitted that "they had no experience of any previous famines" and consequently they had been working under a serious handicap.

The Government of Bengal and the Central Government stand condemned today for inefficient handling of the situation allowing it to drift in the manner it liked. The needs of the civil population were quite forgotten and they had been fiddling when the tune of woes was rending the skies all over Bengal. On September 11 Sir Jagdish Prasad, ex-Member of the Viceroy's Executive Council, said: "Bengal is faced with one of the worst famines in living memory." Sir J. P. Srivastava, the present Food Member in the Viceroy's Executive Council, said on August 27:

"The key to the solution of the present difficult situation in this region is not one of economic policy but of practical, efficient and bold administration and the provinces must see such an administration is set up without delay if it has not been done already."

That it has not been done up till now is admitted on all hands. He has been pleased to pass judgment on the action of the present Bengal Ministry and the Hon'ble Members at the Centre. The whole Government was found napping. On August 30 the *Associated Press of India* reported an interview with him:

"He recalled that during his visit to Calcutta last November, he had consulted almost every section of opinion in Calcutta whether there was any danger of the food situation in Bengal deteriorating. No one seemed to have any misgivings in this direction at that time and he went away satisfied that there would be no shortage of food."

Concluding his statement he had the frankness to say:

"There is very acute shortage of foodstuffs in Bengal and the next three months are going to be crucial. The only way to tide over the situation is to get whatever grain one can have either by seizing,

borrowing or stealing from other parts of India. This is the only method to save the starving millions of Bengal."

In our opinion, the injury has gone too deep and the present prevailing market prices for each and every form of the necessities of life will bring out from their quiet hearths and homes more and more people who have so long refused to come to the gruel kitchens or to approach the public for any kind of help. The "bottle neck" of Indian transport will retard the flow of foodgrains sufficient to meet the demands of Bengal and import from outside is imperatively necessary. It is also necessary to prevent middle class people, the paupers of tomorrow, from falling into further depths of misery and thus check the swelling numbers of those who are already on the streets.

The truth about the ugly rumour of profiteering by the Bengal Government from the sale of Punjab wheat became first known in the Bengal Assembly on September 16. But nobody could suspect that during May to August, the profit amounted to Rs. 33.34 lakhs, "derived solely from sales of wheat to mills," and further "the Bengal Government are not concerned in any of the subsequent transactions," until New Delhi, on October 9, gave out the actual facts. The Government of Bengal had their share of profit in the sale of wheat to the mills, and it is strange that they did not care to know if the output of the mills had safely entered the "black market." In addition to wheat sales the Bengal Government earned a "gross revenue of Rs. 6.32 lakhs from re-sales of wheat products" to the starving people of Bengal. Simply preposterous to think.

The Bengal Government was satisfied with the price control scheme by a sliding scale to take effect from August 26. With the announcement of the scheme, "Government decided to buy rice and paddy" wherever available. Mr Suhrawardy "claimed that the prices had been brought down" and "affirmed that their price policy had not failed." (October 13 and 15.) Mr B. R. Sen, Director-General of Food, explaining (October 1) the recent scheme of the Bengal Government in regard to the procurement of foodgrains, said that "the scheme had evidently failed. The scheme was based on the system of descending scale of prices, i.e., till the middle of August the price fixed was Rs. 30 per maund and then the prices were lowered gradually for every successive week. The expectation was that the hoarded and the new crops reaped would come to the market for quick sale. But the result of the scheme was hardly encouraging; there was even a wholesale disappearance of rice in certain places."

Whom to believe? Our own experience, as also of many other responsible persons of the province, agrees with what the Director-General of Food was pleased to say.

The situation is too deep for handling by frivolous and irresponsible statements and *communiqués*. Even Mr Amery, who till October 14, said about Bengal famine as "scarcity verging on famine," and "these distressing conditions," was forced to yield on October 15 and call it "grievous condition of famine." The Food Member, on October

13, announced "the decision of the Government of India to take supreme control of the Indian food situation and to override Provincial Governments if necessary" and "cessation of food exports from India" perhaps finally for the fifth time, except under special circumstances amounting to not more than 1,000 tons per month.

Two things are absolutely necessary: (i) Food, and more properly equitable and prompt distribution of grains that have been pouring in from different parts of India and about which there is a great nervousness in the public mind; and (ii) Return of confidence in what the Government say and do. This latter has been at a very low ebb brought about by the Civil Supply Minister of the Bengal Government by his frequent irresponsible and big talks of hoarding and punishment, of sufficiency and distribution, of flooding of the market with food and so on and so forth. The Central Food Member, as a corollary to (i) should stop the Bengal authorities from shouting and ask them to work silently, and if they so desire, to propagate the cult of Pakistan and other tenets of the Muslim League and refrain from meddling in food situation of the province in which they have so miserably failed.

## MAHATMA GANDHI 'S FORESIGHT

### NO USE OF SUPERFICIAL MEASURES

Sir Purshotamdas Thakurdas, in a statement, urged that wide publicity should be given to Mahatma Gandhi's article of January 25, 1942, on real war-effort, which Sir Purshotamdas says, will do great good at the present juncture. Sir Purshotamdas quoted from official reports to support his contention that years of under-nourishment were at the root of the present acute distress in India.

He said: "It must be some consolation to all India that both England and America have at last learnt the bare truth about the Indian crisis regarding famine conditions prevailing in Bengal and the threat of scarcity in some parts of the country. It is to be hoped that the correct policy will be adopted by the Government of India regarding procurement of foodgrains from abroad, and distribution of the same in each area, particularly through experienced and reliable Indian channels—both official and trade. I am convinced, after learning further details from various affected parts, that if the correct Indian agency is selected, the difference in the favourable effect both on those affected and those contributing, by their faulty action, to such distress, will be considerable.

"It has been pointed out both in England and in India that at this juncture, politics should not be mixed up with the work of remedying the present danger both in operation in India and threatening her, and I fully concur with this. It is for this reason that I abstain from any effort at allocating the blame for this ominous development, and, in the same vein, I beg to suggest the following to the Viceroy and the members of his Executive Council for their serious consideration. The Government may very usefully get widely distributed all over India, in the various vernaculars of each province, the article written by Mahatma Gandhi in *Harijan* of January 25, 1942, under the caption "Real War Effort." I am convinced that this appeal from Mahatmaji, if brought to the notice of the Indian public on a sufficiently wide scale all over India, will do more good than any preaching by any other association, society, or individual.

"He had proved, by publishing this article as far back as January, 1942, that he foresaw the storm which was gathering in the Indian economic situation.

"Regarding the long-term policy in connection with foodgrain supply, I would like to draw attention to the following reports of two responsible Government servants which indicate, to my mind, the root cause of the acuteness of the distress now prevailing.

"In 1933, the Director of the Indian Medical Service, Major-General Sir John Megaw, estimated that 39 per cent of the Indian people were well nourished, 41 per cent poorly nourished, and 20 per cent very poorly nourished. At least 80 million people of India were perpetually hungry. He reported further that disease was widely dis-

seminated throughout India and was increasing steadily and rather rapidly. In Bengal 78 per cent. of the population were undernourished. The peasantry of Bengal, says an official report of the Director of Health, are in large proportion taking to a dietary on which even rats could not live for more than a few weeks.

"The cumulative effect of the above-mentioned factors in operation presumably for decades and more, has now made itself felt to a horrifying extent, and any action in the direction of a long-term policy to remedy the present crisis must take cognisance of this deterioration in the economic condition of the masses, as allowed to progress and accentuate itself during the last few decades. Any superficial measures can, at best, bring only temporary relief—if at all effective—and it is to be hoped that the Secretary of State for India will at least now insist on the Government of India taking whole-hearted and effective action regarding a long-term policy to prevent further deterioration in the stamina and calibre of the masses of India. A tremendous whole-hearted and well laid-out plan is called for and cannot be avoided, eventually, and should be delayed no longer."



## SIR PURSHOTAMDAS'S WARNING

### NEED FOR COMPREHENSIVE ENQUIRY

"I cannot help feeling that the fearful collapse of the masses in Bengal within a few months after the scarcity of grain made itself felt must be due to the stamina of the masses having been run down over a period of years," said Sir Purshotamdas Thakurdas in an interview to the *Daily Herald*, London.

"The problem appears to me to be a much more far-reaching one requiring whole-hearted effective action regarding the long-term policy of Government to prevent further deterioration in the stamina and calibre of the Indian masses. The imperative warning given by the Director-General, I.M.S., in 1933 and by the Director of Health, Bengal, should be thoroughly examined and reported upon by a competent committee when the famine emergency is tided over. It is not unlikely that to remedy this fundamental changes may have to be brought about in the land revenue system in several parts of India. Indeed, people conversant with Bengal conditions have already said the land revenue system there requires considerable modification.

"Simultaneously with this, I feel the question of the cattle wealth of India requires most urgently to be examined and set right. Representations were made to the Government of India months back pointing out that prime cattle were not escaping slaughter during the last one year or more. The problem is a very vital one from the point of view not only of agriculture but also of making milk and milk-products available to the poor at reasonable rates, especially in view of the very low *per capita* consumption of milk."

Sir Purshotamdas Thakurdas referred to the greatest weakness of the Indian economic structure, *viz.*, absence of statistics worthy of any credence, and stressed that whilst one did not defend what was called hoards for purpose of profiteering, a distinction had to be made that the retention of what a man grows on his own land cannot be run down as wicked hoarding. "It is this tendency of the Indian grower not to part with all his produce, especially grain, unless he need, that has saved the situation so far. For indeed if more had been brought to the market a year back the Government would have let more go out of India, and the situation today would have been accentuated still further. I am not convinced that those compelling villagers to part with their foodgrains are doing a service because all this must react on the tendency to grow foodgrains."

Sir Purshotamdas then recalled the remarks made by Sir William Hunter, the first Director-General of Statistics in India, about 1870, saying they had peculiar relevance today. Sir William raised the frank question to himself—"whether the prosperity of the prosperous is not highly paid for by the poverty of the poor and whether this splendid fabric of British rule does not rest deep down on the harder struggle for life."

Sir Puishotamdas continued: "About 70 years later Nature has asserted itself and the economic fabric of India shows sure signs of having been shaken at its foundations, giving ample warning against any further continuation of the policy which Sir William Hunter appeared nervous about 70 years back as it is not feasible. It is clear any change in the Indian economic policy must inspire confidence in the Indian public at large. To this end, a substantial change in the existing political atmosphere is imperative. Personally I would like to avoid a reference to this, but I feel that would be a handicap to the whole-hearted long-term policy being introduced. Emphasis which has been put on the Central Government's anxiety not to disturb provincial autonomy strikes those who know local conditions as pathetic, and whilst no one wants any Provincial Government disturbed deliberately in its autonomy, its negation of any supervision by the Government at the Centre is to put forward excuse which appears to have been so handy, but is in fact a confession of helplessness on the part of the Viceroy. To the lay public it is difficult to know whether the fault lay with the Ministry or the local Executive headed by the Governor. Wherever the fault may have been it is not necessary to apportion blame at this juncture, but it is essential to decide whether any such administration is to be allowed to go on under the garb of so-called Provincial Autonomy.

Concluding, he said: "The various suggestions of the Foodgrains Policy Committee would at best prove to be superficial in their effect and, without being alarmist, I would stress my conviction from reports reaching me that nothing but a comprehensive inquiry into the causes of this crisis and immediate steps to remedy it may put the country, with normal good luck, out of danger within three to five years. The confidence of the masses being shaken, it must take a fairly long time and substantial reforms to bring about lasting improvement."

## VILLAGE GRAIN BANKS

In an article published in the *Social Welfare*, Mr Vaikunth L. Mehta wrote:—

The problem of ensuring an adequate supply of food for India's four hundred millions has become the first concern of everyone without distinction of political creeds. The crisis in Bengal has brought home the urgency of preventive and protective measures in every village and town. Yet there is a tendency to depend abjectly upon the State to take the initiative at every step. State action on a comprehensive basis demands a thoroughness of organization which it is obviously impracticable to set up at short notice. Moreover, State action may well be called for in areas, urban and rural, where local production does not fulfil the minimum requirements of the consumers on a self-sufficiency basis. Transport shortage demands, as far as possible, a solution based upon decentralized regional self-sufficiency. The whole problem may thus be devised as between those areas which are not able to grow their own food for the whole year, as, for instance, the larger industrial towns, and other deficit areas which do not grow enough for the whole population. Now that the Gregory Committee has strongly disapproved of exports of rice and recommended net imports to cover the absolute "gap" it may be possible to treat that aspect of the question as being within sight of a solution.

But central control has very definite limitations. The problem may be aggravated at certain points by ignorance of local requirements or lack of foresight regarding the vagaries of the seasons, resulting in much avoidable suffering to the poorest sections of our people. It is, therefore, essential to organize and ensure an adequate supply of food wherever it is possible to do so, on a basis of village self-sufficiency. Decentralized self-sufficiency is not, however, an alternative but a powerful auxiliary to central control of deficit areas. There is, therefore, no reason to look upon the former as a rival project. On the other hand, central control could itself come forward to provide all the necessary facilities for organized self-sufficiency over as wide a field as possible, in order to reduce the strain upon its resources and administration.

Both for Government and the people, the feeding of the population in rural as well as urban areas in the economic disequilibrium caused by the war has become a problem of the acutest concern. The woes of the town-dweller and the industrial worker in urban areas are ever before the public and the State, thanks to the fact that these sections of the community are fairly vocal and are often organized. The large bulk of our population, however, live in villages; and it is this section of the community which produces the food that supports the small urban and industrial population. It is essential, therefore, that the needs of the rural population should receive as much consideration as—if not more so than—those of the urban and industrial population. To this end, it is necessary that when schemes .

are drawn up for pooling and distributing the foodgrains that are produced in the country proper measures should be devised to safeguard the food requirements of the rural population, the peasant proprietors, tenants and labour as well as dependants.

The operations of the grain banks should be limited, it may be suggested, at the outset, to such quantity of the principal foodgrains in a village as will be adequate to feed for a period of one full year the entire population of the village according to the ration of 1 lb. per day for every adult and child over 6 and half of that quantity for children below 6. It is necessary to explain why this restriction is proposed. It has to be recognized that at the present day there is for various reasons—into the details of which it is not necessary to enter here—a shortage of foodgrains available in India. This shortage affects principally the areas where on account of soil or seasonal conditions, the production of foodgrains is not sufficient to feed the local population, the areas which for seasonal or other causes have run short of their normal supplies, and the growing population in town and cities. Treating India as one nation, we are all members of one family and it is our duty to see that none of the members of the family is left to starve. At the same time, there is the duty the rural producers owe to their immediate neighbours; and these two duties have to be brought into harmony with each other. This is possible if in every village sufficient grain is stocked for the full requirements for the next 12 months for the entire population, workers as well as their dependants. When these are properly provided for, the rest of the stocks should be available for use outside the village. That surplus will go to meet the deficits in other areas. Rural social workers who undertake the duty of assisting the rural population to form village grain banks have to do such spade work before the banks get going. They have to start with the work of conducting a preliminary census of the residents, dividing them into three categories—the owners of land, tenants and labourers. Besides, there will be in all villages a sprinkling of non-descripts who depend on charity. The census will have a twofold object: to note down what quantity of the principal foodgrain which is to be stored will be required by families in the various groups—the workers as well as their dependants; at the same time, figures will be recorded of the quantity of foodgrains that will be produced by the two former groups—owners and tenants—according to the acreage cultivated by them. Out of their total production each of these will be called upon to provide to the bank a quota which covers, first, their own requirements and, secondly, *pro rata*, the requirements of the labouring population. The total requirements of the last-named class will be determined and, to meet these owners and tenants will be called upon to contribute to the pool in proportion to their production. An additional contribution, approximately of about 5 per cent., may be requisitioned for the helpless, aged and poor, usually fed by charity, and also to cover drriage, etc.

Normally, individual proprietors and tenants may have a surplus after contributing to the common pool in the manner indicated above. That surplus will be at their own disposal for sale or meeting outside

requisitions. For the quotas that individuals make over and above the requirements of their own families they may have to be paid in cash. By mutual arrangements this cash payment may be spread over the whole year. Labourers who are unable to make deposits of grain in kind will draw their supplies from week to week. In the first week, they will get their supplies on credit, but subsequently they will draw their rations against cash payments. Such cash receipts will be available for payment to the owners and tenants from whom additional quotas have been received for the common pool.

The management of the bank need not present much difficulty once the preliminary investigations have been conducted, the quotas fixed, the weekly ration prescribed and the details properly sketched and explained. No elaborate organization need be created to take charge of the operations, nor need any complicated constitution be prescribed for the conduct of affairs. All that will be necessary will be to set up, informally, a panchayat—a committee of five persons or so—with a chairman and a secretary—and to provide simple rules for the maintenance of the stocks, the keeping of accounts, the custody of cash and similar matters.

## DR S. P. MOOKERJEE'S STATEMENT

### A DARK AND DISMAL PROSPECT

The following statement was issued by Dr Syama Prasad Mookerjee on November 12:—

During the last two months and a half we have not spared ourselves to alleviate suffering and misery in Bengal and I once again take this opportunity of thanking generous donors throughout India and abroad who have sent donations, big and small, in cash or in kind. Most of the non-official organizations are working in co-operation with each other. I have been directly associated with the work of the Bengal Relief Committee and of the Bengal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha. The total donations received by the former amount to about 20 lakhs of rupees both in cash and in kind while the latter have similarly received about four lakhs of rupees. The Bengal Relief Committee is serving about three lakhs of persons daily in more than 125 centres distributed in 20 districts of the province. They are receiving either free cooked food or free or cheap grains and also relief in the shape of medicine, cloth, etc. If the present activities continue till the end of December the total expenditure will cost more than the sum of twenty lakhs of rupees already received.

The policy of sending away of destitutes from Calcutta has been marked by forcible removal without proper regard of classification of each family unit. Reports are pouring in which indicate that family members are being separated without any possibility of those remaining behind knowing the whereabouts of those who are being taken away. I have stated over and again that the destitutes should be sent to receiving centres as near their homes as possible with the ultimate object of sending them to their villages, provision being made at every stage to supply them with food and other requirements. Detailed reports should be published by the Government showing that these conditions are being fulfilled and groups of non-official visitors should be allowed to inspect the centres from time to time. If these destitutes die of want and hunger after they are driven away from Calcutta, it will create further serious complications.

Let us not forget that it is mainly the want of food that has forced the people away from their homes and has reduced them to miserable wanderers. Again thousands of those who are remaining in villages and towns are silently perishing or suffering for want of food and nourishment. Nearly a month ago I pointed out that the Bengal crisis could not be averted unless there was a definite scheme for creating a store for every group of villages and towns in the province which would supply grains either free or at reasonable rates. Today the confidence of the people in the capacity of the Government to provide for even minimum supply of foodgrains is completely shaken. This confidence will not be restored by mere official statements and communiqués. There must be a physical demonstration

REVERSE FOR DURGA  
THIS YEAR



of stocks of foodgrains in each area which will at once create a tremendous psychological change in the minds of the people and will inspire them to pool all their available resources for saving the people. It is regrettable that although, according to official figures, more than four hundred and seventy thousand tons of foodgrains have come into Bengal from outside on Government account during the last seven months (April-October), local stocks have not been built up and distress has been steadily on the increase.

We demand from Government a clear statement as to where and to whom these stocks have gone. We want to know not only the names of the districts but the names of sub-divisions, thanas, unions and even of villages where foodgrains have been sent during the last three months. Let the people of each locality know of the exact position. A haphazard system of sending out grains to districts or even to some sub-divisional headquarters without a clear-cut policy of equitable distribution which will touch the village centres is worse than useless. Ship-loads of foodgrains are coming to Calcutta but the scheme of distribution is utterly defective. We demand immediate formulation of a scheme which will minimize the delay in sending out grains and clothes to the main receiving centres which in their turn must, according to a careful planning, re-distribute to the sub-centres within their jurisdiction, thus covering as quickly as possible the affected areas throughout the province. Regular weekly reports should be issued for public information.

The next problem is of pooling of all available local resources. Here again the Government must change its present policy of thoughtless purchase which more than anything else has been responsible for the grave crisis that is going to cost millions of human lives in this province. Reports have reached us that even now Government agents are busy making purchases and where they have done so or even attempted to do so, the price level has shown a sharp rise. If the Government wants to purchase, it must take simultaneous responsibility for distribution. No compromise is possible in this respect.

Calcutta and the surrounding industrial areas should be treated as a separate zone altogether. Government of India should specially undertake to feed this area from stocks to be despatched to Bengal. Once the Greater Calcutta area is taken out, and Government and speculative purchasers take off their hands from the rural market for some time at least, the crisis will disappear and normal conditions will be quickly restored. Government must of course keep close watch so that movements from one area to another may take place under proper safeguards; stocks must also be declared by traders and stockists and all attempts at hoarding for profiteering must be vigorously checked. It is difficult to say for how long the provincial stock of *aman* crop will be sufficient to feed the whole of Bengal excluding Greater Calcutta area. But there will be ample time to scrutinize the situation and to take effective steps for a long-range policy affecting the entire year 1944 and also the future. This aspect must not be ignored.



Another urgent need is proper medical relief. Cholera, dysentery and malaria are creating widespread havoc. We are providing from the Bengal Relief Committee and the Hindu Mahasabha anti-cholera medicines for about one lakh of people. But this is too little. Here again lack of co-ordination between official and non-official efforts is most distressing. Government efforts are also extremely limited and lack in quickness and vigour. Clothes are another special need, particularly with the approach of winter. The condition of children is deplorable and we require a well-planned scheme for their protection by establishing colonies where they will be fed and clothed and trained until normal conditions return.

Dark and dismal though the prospect is, I say with all the earnestness at my command that it is possible to turn the present catastrophe into channels which will ultimately lead to a complete social and economic reconstruction of our beloved province. The average economic level of a Bengali was indeed very low and this heavy blow of man-made famine has almost crushed his power of resistance. We have to build up a co-operative organization for every group of villages which will aim at the following essentials: (a) Collection and distribution of foodgrains from local and outside resources; (b) grow more food campaign; (c) health, economic and educational reconstruction.

I am not suggesting that all these tasks can be undertaken immediately to the fullest extent. But a complete programme has to be framed and beginning made as quickly as possible to save the province from utter collapse.

## NON-OFFICIAL RELIEF

### MR SYMONDS ON OBSTACLES SURMOUNTED

*The following is a contribution from Mr J. R. Symonds, officer-in-charge, Friends' Ambulance Unit, on Bengal famine:*

To deal adequately with the many types of relief work undertaken by hundreds—even thousands—of relief committees functioning in Bengal over the past six months is impossible in the space at my disposal. Nor, in any case, can this be more than an interim report on operations which are still in progress, and which are almost daily changing their character. All I can do is to pick out a few of the more significant features of the work. There is no need to apologize to the many organizations of which no mention is made and whose work is its own reward.

In a situation in which the staple commodities are Government controlled, the function of voluntary organizations is less obvious than in the old days of *laissez faire*, when relief work took the form of purchase of food, clothes and medical supplies by voluntary organizations from outside, and of distribution by their own workers within the affected area. The basic need in Bengal has been for rice. With market prices at eight times the normal, it has been almost impossible for voluntary organizations to purchase except through Government at a subsidized rate, and their main service has, therefore, been to ensure efficient and honest distribution. But in addition to this there is the secondary duty—to keep one month ahead of Government in foreseeing the changing needs of the various phases of the famine. And to stimulate Government, not only by recommendations, but by the example of small-scale pieces of work. And, further, to undertake pieces of work which require more care and devotion than can be expected of large-scale Government schemes (e.g. the care of orphans and old people).

Relief operations in Bengal hitherto may conveniently be grouped in four chronological stages:—

(1) The Midnapore Cyclone and Burdwan Floods, a dress rehearsal, September 1942, to July 1943.

(2) The Famine in Calcutta, July 1943, to October 1943

(3) The Famine in the Districts, August 1943 to November 1943.

(4) The winter, disease, and the legacy of the famine, November 1943, onwards.

The effects of the cyclone and tidal bore which swept the mouth of the Hooghly in September 1942, killing 15,000 and rendering many more homeless, are widely known. What is less generally recognized is that in Midnapore probably as many have perished since of starvation, exposure and disease as died in the cyclone. Cholera, pneumonia, and malignant malaria in turn took their toll and in July 1942, it

might be said that the inhabitants of part of the Contai Sub Division were still as badly off as they had been in the weeks after the cyclone.

Some dozen organizations had come into the field at the time of the cyclone and several of them were still there—the Ramakrishna Mission, distributing rice doles, the Friends' Ambulance Unit, giving out powdered milk to infants, the Hindu Mission and Hindu Mahasabha running orphanages and hospitals. Their work had at one time been co-ordinated by the Governor's Cyclone Relief Committee and by Dr S. P. Mookerjee's non-official committee. Thus there was already a steady tradition of relief work and of co-operation between voluntary organizations when the condition of Midnapore began to prevail throughout half the Province.

All through the year the price of rice had been steadily rising in Calcutta. At first the main function of voluntary organizations had been simply to provide marshals at the huge queues of bustee people which stood outside the Government-controlled grain shops. This was particularly valuable in the women's queues, where the presence of female volunteers made it possible for the bustee women to attend unaccompanied by male escorts, thereby considerably diminishing the frequency of tumults. But by August, when the vigorous articles and macabre pictures of *The Statesman* brought the condition of Calcutta before the whole world, more drastic action had become necessary, and free kitchens were springing up rapidly all over the City. Many of these were financed by large organizations, the Bengal Relief Committee and Marwari Relief Society in particular. But the majority were run by local committees on local funds. Supplies were issued to them by Government on condition that they gave out official "gruel"—*jowar*, *bajra*, rice and *dhal*, mixed together in equal quantities with vegetables. By September approximately 80,000 destitutes were being fed by some fifty different organizations. Gruel kitchens were the basis of relief work, and medical clinics and milk canteens for babies were often attached to them.

At the end of October conditions in Calcutta began to improve as destitutes left the City. What proportion of these were evacuated by Government through relief camps, what proportion returned of their own volition to attend to the harvest, and what proportion ran out of the city in a panic for fear that the police lorries which were engaged in rounding them up were taking them to be sacrificed to the new Howrah Bridge or enlisted in the army, was a matter of controversy. But what was clear was that as conditions in Calcutta were improving, the districts were deteriorating, and non-official attention became increasingly concentrated on the mofussil, and, in particular, on East Bengal.

Here conditions of work were much harder, both for transport of supplies and workers. Nevertheless, devoted work was and is being done by Missions and local Committees. Several of the societies which functioned in Calcutta expanded their work on all Bengal basis, some specializing in particular forms of relief. Thus the Red Cross opened milk canteens in all the affected districts, and by November was feeding 120,000 infants and nursing mothers daily. The Friends' Ambu-

lance Unit and Bengal Women's Food Committee specialized in providing a well-balanced daily meal for children of the age group three to fourteen, with the inclusion of shark liver oil for the most undernourished. The Ramakrishna Mission gave out rice doles. The Bengal Civil Protection Committee sent out medical parties to undertake cholera inoculation and anti-malaria work. Local committees ran numerous free kitchens, destitutes' camps and hospitals. In some cases, as at Dacca, a Central Relief Committee was formed, in which both officials and non-officials co-operated to handle all the grain which came into the city, thus completely cutting out the possibility of profiteering by the middleman.

In November an excellent crop began to come in, and the price of rice fell. But the cold weather brought other problems. 2,300,000 were by now attending free kitchens in the province. Their resistance to cold had been greatly reduced by malnutrition, and few of them could afford the clothing or blankets which they might normally have purchased at this time of year. The condition of the sick in primitive camp hospitals was particularly unfortunate. Already suffering from dysentery or starvation diarrhoea, they became liable to bronchitis and pneumonia also, and even in Government-sponsored hospitals there were often no blankets at all. Thus in the month of November most voluntary organizations devoted themselves to the distribution of clothes and blankets in the interim period before the large Government orders could be fulfilled.

Though the food situation improved in November and transport of supplies was greatly accelerated by the assistance of the army, disease spread, and, in particular, cholera and malaria. Cholera vaccines were not difficult to obtain, and inoculation on a wide-scale, one of the most valuable functions of Indian voluntary organizations, was possible. But of quinine, in spite of Government's announcement that <sup>over</sup> 95 per cent. of the Province's normal supplies were available, the shortage was acute and widespread, and there was little to be done by the voluntary organizations in face of malaria, which is at present the greatest problem of all.

That is a very bare record of the main work that has been done. I have said nothing of the discomforts of long journeys by country-boat down canals in which decaying corpses floated by: of tramping through paddy fields to remote villages at midnight to undertake the disheartening uphill fight of giving saline and glucose injections by torchlight to cholera patients. For it would be pointless to describe the horrors when, like Macbeth we have supped full with horrors, and can regard jackals and vultures almost with benevolence as scavengers. Nor can I do more than pay general tribute to the host of unknown workers belonging to no organization, but feeding the poor at their door—A.R.P. workers, scouts, troops, missionaries, teachers, doctors, students, pleaders. Their reward is the knowledge that in a world at war they have been able for a few months to build instead of to destroy. Seeking no credit for themselves some indeed have truly observed the injunction of the *Bhagavad Gita*—

" . . . Therefore, thy task prescribed

With spirit unattached gladly perform,  
 Since in performance of plain duty man  
 Mounts to his highest bliss."

The most acute stage of the famine is now over, and we will shortly be facing its legacy. At present most voluntary organizations are still preoccupied with emergency work and with the distribution of clothes and drugs in particular. Then there will remain the wreckage, orphans to be brought up, the landless to be rehabilitated and separated families to be reunited. These problems require patience and humanity which are the greatest contribution of the voluntary organizations. The All-India Women's Conference is establishing orphanages in most of the affected districts; the Y.W.C.A. is providing case workers to trace lost members of families; and several organizations have plans in hand for the settlement of some landless members and the teaching of new trades to others.

I am often asked to justify the existence of voluntary organizations in a world in which State control becomes increasingly more universal. Even Government sometimes queries the value of organizations working outside its own extensive machinery. The justification, as I have already suggested, is two-fold. Firstly, the good voluntary organization is almost invariably ahead of Government, both in theory and execution. It has no precedents to consult, no files to lose, no public holidays to observe and no finance department with which to conduct a dignified controversy. Its arguments are drawn from the suffering it has seen at first hand on the field and its immediate policy shaped by the amount of money it can immediately lay hands on. Secondly, the voluntary organization works on a restricted scale, and can therefore afford to be humane, giving the vital extra attention to the individual which is not feasible or economical in a large scheme.

Even though it is not possible to stand back now, in the middle of the battle, to point out lessons and morals of the famine, it is difficult even at this stage to refrain from some exclamation of mixed admiration and dismay—admiration for the unpartisan work of individuals, dismay at the communalism of organizations which set out to give relief to Mussalmans, Hindus or Christians only; admiration for the generosity of merchants who have quietly sold clothes and blankets to relief organizations at cost price; dismay at those who have sold adulterated quinine and emetine and directly caused loss of life. There are moments of extreme depression. To work in an atmosphere in which the black market is not only tolerated but encouraged by many of the most respected citizens of the province, would embitter an outsider could he not call to mind a host of Bengali friends of all ranks of life, who in their often unmethodical way are capable—as Edward Thompson has said—of the most devoted relief work in the wo

## APPEAL BY MODY AND SARKER

### THE DANGERS OF THE POLICY OF INACTION

Sir H. P. Mody and Mr Nalini Ranjan Sarker, former Members of the Viceroy's Executive Council, in a statement jointly issued say that "Lord Wavell has begun well. He has inaugurated his regime with a determined attack on the food muddle which has aroused the attention of the world. There is every reason to hope that, from the point of view of administration, his tenure of office will be characterized by vigour and directness of action.

"Has not India, however, a right to expect something from a Viceroy of such outstanding qualities of leadership and such a close and up-to-date acquaintance with Indian problems? How long is India to continue to lie under a political coma and the general atmosphere to remain surcharged with stagnation?

"At the Pilgrims' luncheon in London a little while ago, Lord Wavell said he fully realized the great weight of opinion both here and in India in favour of solving as early as possible the present deadlock. He referred to the difficulties in the way, but he had vision nonetheless of 'the great possibilities in front of India if she can only be induced to take the right road.' How does his Excellency propose to induce India to take the right road? By keeping the leaders of the largest political party in the country indefinitely behind prison bars? The continuation of such a policy at the most decisive stage of the war must obviously require strong justification, and the demand for a public recantation by the Congress leaders of the movement which they are charged with having fostered—which, incidentally, would amount in effect to their convicting themselves out of their own mouths—cannot possibly provide such a justification. The movement is dead, and no one believes that the release of the Congress leaders would mean a revival, or would create conditions which would once again be a threat to public peace.

"The real reason, and it has to be frankly stated, would appear to be that Government have a pleasant comfortable feeling that all is well, that men and materials are readily forthcoming for the efficient prosecution of the war and that it would be a mistake, therefore, to do anything which might jeopardise such a condition of things. The general opinion in the country, however, is that as a preventive measure the detention can no longer be justified, and that Government have only to thank themselves if their action lends itself to the interpretation that in effect it is punitive. From any point of view, the position of Government seems to be untenable, and they will only be rendering the chance of an ultimate settlement more difficult if they persist in the attitude that 'for the duration no other policy is possible.'

"Incidentally it passes one's comprehension how any approach to

a solution of the deadlock is possible, if one of the main contending parties is prevented from taking stock of the situation and denied an opportunity of reconsidering it.

"It stands to reason, therefore, that in the forefront of any action which may be taken to end the deadlock must be the release of the Congress leaders. Assuming that is done, the next step should be for the Viceroy publicly to offer to form a National Government on the basis of principles of the Cripps offer. From our own experience, we have no doubt that if such a Government was formed the administration of the country would be effectively in their hands. We attach a great deal of importance to a political set-up of this character. It is only by getting together in the prosecution of the common tasks of Government that suspicions and bitterness, which are such a marked characteristic of our present political life, will have a chance of being blotted out.

"In this connection, we must emphasize that it does not help the British Cabinet to keep on parading the acute differences that today divide the people of India as a reason for a policy of inaction. Up to a point, it was logical to maintain the view that the destinies of India must be shaped by her own people. A stage has, however, been reached when fundamental differences of outlook threaten to make the problem insoluble, and something more than negative approach is called for from those to whom are committed the fortunes of this country. Government must surely have a positive policy. How often, in the past, have they not sheltered themselves behind their responsibilities as a Government and ignored the considered viewpoint of the leaders of all parties and communities? They must do away, therefore, with their obsession about the political differences of the moment, and must assume the role of a Government whose business it should be to pursue their declared objective and bring about its consummation.

"We have suggested a public approach to political opinion in the country, as the method of individual negotiations has led nowhere all these years. An open invitation to Indian leaders to frame proposals for a provisional Government would have many advantages. It would be both a challenge and an invitation to India as a whole to assume the reins of power at one of the turning points of history, and it might well be that such a procedure might evoke what might be regarded as a national verdict.

"There is no time to lose. When the statesmen of leading countries are gathered together at the peace table to create a better world it would be nothing short of a tragedy if this country were found to be still divided and unable to speak through the mouths of its chosen leaders. India is playing a notable part in the fight for freedom, and no less an authority than Lord Wavell had very recently paid a striking tribute to the magnitude of her contribution to the common cause, and, we repeat, it would be a tragedy if she were, for any reason, prevented from contributing her proper share to the building up of a new order. It would be inexcusable complacency, if not worse, if the Government, either in England or here, were to

fix their gaze exclusively on the conclusion of hostilities as the starting point of a new policy in this country. All over the world the leaders of the people, as well as Governments, are concentrating on the enormous problems which will present themselves for solution at the end of the war, and it is our conviction that in this most constructive period India will find herself woefully left behind in the leadership of ideas and of action which, in common with her allies, is her due. If such a call to our leaders, as we have suggested, were to come, they can only ignore it at the sacrifice of India's vital interests.



# MR ARTHUR MOORE URGES RESOLUTE ACTION

## PROGRESSIVE DERANGEMENT OF INDIAN ECONOMY

In the course of a letter to the Press, Mr. Arthur Moore, former editor of the *Statesman*, wrote:—

Two necessities confront us: the necessity for immediate salvage measures for Bengal, Orissa and large areas of Southern India and preparation of medical and sanitary plans to cope with a possible sudden sweep of epidemic disease; and the necessity for long-term planning to deal with the root scourge of inhuman poverty.

Today we are keying up for resolute action. The famine is recognized to be a menace not only to military plans but to the economy and health of the world, large areas of which are elsewhere also being devastated. We have a new Viceroy, the sense of a fresh start. Bad though things may be, the flag of hope is fluttering in a faintly perceptible breeze.

In this new atmosphere, better suited to obtain for it a hearing, let me reproduce from an article called "Beloved India" in the *Fortnightly Review* of November 1932, a passage in which, foreseeing that "starvation itself" would finally step in, I advocated intensive planning. The Russian example to which I referred will also encounter less prejudice now than it did 11 years ago. Here is the passage:—

"The outstanding fact about India is the poverty of the people and the prospect of this becoming steadily worse with the enormous growth of the population until, failing wars or pestilence, starvation itself steps in to adjust the balance. No one is doing anything about this. We have no plan and the Indians have no plan.

"We have to recover lost goodwill. We can only do this as a moral force actively helping India to the conquest of new worlds, the realization of new ideals.

"It ought to be possible to devise a great Indian plan, drawn up by an Economic General Staff, on lines as large as Russia's plans, but far more beneficent. India has credit in Britain, where Russia had none, so there is no question of dumping goods on the outside world in order to obtain credits wherewith to buy machinery and pay experts."

Lord Reading discussed the above passage with me and said: "When I was Viceroy I sometimes had some such idea of intensive planning on a big scale, but I was too busy on day-to-day administration ever to get down to it. I doubt if any Viceroy will ever find the time." But it is not Viceregal time so much as Viceregal initiative that is required, and now there is hope.

One reason why it was impossible to get a hearing in 1932 was that the increasing poverty was concealed by the sale of the gold savings of the people for export abroad which began the previous year and continued throughout the thirties. During the decade hundreds of crores, the equivalent of several years of the total revenue of the

Government of India, were exported to England in the form of gold, and a large section of the population parted with and lived on their hoarded treasure. Gold was rising in value, and the export was naturally welcome to the British treasury. The Government of India encouraged it. It was impossible to get them to purchase the gold themselves and use it as a base for development loans, or even to check the export by a tax. How heavily the slump which started in 1930, and unfortunately coincided with a non-co-operation campaign, hit the Indian poor (whose almost only practicable method of saving has been a metal hoard) is shown by the fact that whereas in 1929-30 India still imported Rs. 25 crores of precious metals, the equivalent of one rupee per head of her population, three years later she was already exporting at almost double this rate, in the form of distress gold.

Unofficial response to suggestions for planning was necessarily ineffective. Mr G. D. Birla in 1934 addressed the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce on the subject, and his speech, published in pamphlet form as *A Plea for Planning*, gave figures on the fall in the total foodgrains available *per capita* which are worth studying to-day. He calculated that the decreased figures for consumption plus the substitution for an import of treasure equal to one rupee per head of the population of an export equal to one rupee thirteen annas might mean that between 1930 and 1933 the average annual income of the people in real wealth had dropped four rupees.

Some years later an unofficial National Planning Committee was formed with Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru as Chairman. Its work, which was regionally allocated, was interrupted when he and others were arrested, but the material collected is presumably still available. The Government of India might find it of some use today.

India's economy has been progressively deranged since 1930. The war, which has necessitated a large export of her products abroad and greater internal reservation of them for military purposes, has further increased the strain, as the public statements of Sir John Anderson in Parliament and of Lord Wavell before he left England have judiciously recognized. To start recovery she needs a steady flow of food and of consumer goods from abroad, and to find ships for this is itself an urgent military necessity. There will still be a large balance owing to India for war goods even if the Allies start paying more in the form of imports, and it is essential that payment of this balance by inflationary finance should end. Because Britain has tended to regard India as a possession it has not occurred to her to adopt the same sound methods of war finance as she adopted for America. In the last war she immediately sent Lord Reading to arrange a large dollar loan, and in this war until Lease-Lend came to her aid not only did she strain her shipping resources to keep up her exports to the U.S.A., she even sold out her private capital investments. If today Indian opinion were properly rallied to war effort and the financial reasons explained Britain would have no difficulty in raising a rupee loan, and if some British-owned properties were sold as well as any Indian securities privately held in Britain, they would fetch a fair price.

## PROF. MEGHNAD SAHA'S APPEAL

### PUBLIC CO-OPERATION FOR RELIEF WORK

"Our brethren in other parts of India are already aware of the terrible famine conditions in Bengal from the descriptions appearing from the pens of such persons as Pandit Hirday Nath Kunzru and Mr K. Santhanam, Mrs V. L. Pandit and others," said Prof. Meghnad Saha, F.R.S., in a statement to the Press. "There are no foodgrains for about a population of three crores (except those who usually stock for a year) for the month of November and the first half of December. Landless labourers, artisans, fishermen, and middle class gentry are suffering from starvation, and already the death-roll has been heavy. But if prompt relief measures are not forthcoming, one shudders to think of the consequences in November and December.

"This is neither the time nor the place to wrangle about the responsibility for this horrible state of affairs. But a good portion of the doomed population can be saved if prompt measures of relief are taken. This is a three-fold problem; importation of sufficient foodstuffs, their transportation to affected areas and proper storage, and an efficient scheme of distribution. We read in the papers of large stocks of foodgrains which are being sent to Bengal. It is said that 2,400 tons are reaching Bengal every day, but this is just sufficient to feed 40 lakhs of people. To give adequate food, at least eight times this quantity should reach Bengal each day. But, on account of the inefficient machinery, there is unusual delay before these grains can reach the destitute people. In some areas, no relief has yet reached, and people are perishing in large numbers. In this connection, I may relate some personal experience, and this is typical. For a certain affected area in the Dacca district, some of the people in Calcutta who hailed from that part formed themselves into a relief party and raised money among themselves for the relief of their co-villagers. The first difficulty was purchase of rice, as none was available in the local market on the officially declared control rate. After great difficulty, a few maunds could be procured. Then came the questions of getting permit for export from Calcutta and arrangement of transport. Then the relief party discovered that all foodgrains exported from outside to a district have to be assigned to the magistrate of the district, and unless permits can be secured at the other end they will never reach the people for whom they were meant. After a month's trial, the relief party found that by the time the official procedure could be complied with most of the people would be dead. They, therefore, sent the money they collected to the local organization, where they could get rice only at Rs. 45/60 per maund from peasant proprietors who had some stocks. It is needless to add that relief could be given to a very small number of people.

"This illustrates the difficulty which is facing most of the private relief spontaneously sprung mostly with centres at Calcutta. The smaller parties are mostly formed of people who have migrated from

NOTHING DAUNTED



Prof. Meghnad Saha has appealed to Government to release Congress leaders on parole.  
—*The Hindustan Times*, 2-11-1943.

the rural areas years ago, and have done well in Calcutta. They have been working for relieving the people of the locality from which they hail, in co-operation with and often under direction and with the assistance of bigger organizations like the Bengal Relief Committee, the Marwari Relief Association, the Calcutta Relief Committee, etc., etc. In spite of tremendous difficulties, they have done good work, but far better work can be done if the official technicalities can be simplified, or the private organizations receive sympathetic treatment.

"The only bright spot in this dreary picture is the large-hearted and spontaneous response from the rest of India. The services rendered by such graphic descriptions as given out by Kunwar Jagdish Prasad and others who have visited the stricken areas and have witnessed the plight of the people with their own eyes have been very helpful. No words of praise or gratitude can be too high for the measures of relief which have been organized by the Marwari merchants settled in Calcutta. They have not only organized very effective and large-scale measures for the relief of middle class families of Calcutta by selling rice at small price, but by opening free kitchens both in town and mofussil areas, and by undertaking tours in the district to get first-hand knowledge of the conditions, and opening centres there, they have saved a large number from certain death.

"Starvation from death and diseases consequent on starvation stares in the face of crores of population, and I wish to appeal to our brethren in other parts of India to come to the rescue of the unfortunate victims by large-scale contributions of money, clothing and food-stuff to the various relief organizations which have been set up. A maund of rice or wheat saves three lives for a month, and according to the estimates of Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee, who has acquainted himself first-hand with information, 60 lakhs of maunds of rice are required within the next months, if the people are to be saved. The collections so far of all relief organizations amount to only 30 lakhs of rupees, which is far too small a sum compared to the stupendousness of the task. Free gifts of clothing for the destitute people in the coming winter will be greatly welcome.

"I would appeal to the Government of the country that they should make a public declaration that the feeding of the civil population is as much their duty and obligation as the feeding of the military, industrial workers, and men in services essential for war-effort. Confidence of the people in the Government has been badly shaken, and only a public declaration to the above effect and setting up of an efficient machinery to give effect to the food policy in accordance with the above declaration can to some extent retrieve yet the situation. It is also a pity that the Government has not yet seen its way in releasing, at least on parole, a large number of Congress workers like Mr Satish Chandra Das Gupta and others who have wide experience of relief operations within the last 20 years. If they can be released, and their co-operation for relief work can be secured very prompt and effective relief measures can be immediately organized."

## THE BENGAL FAMINE

### INDIA AND HER PEOPLE ON TRIAL

Commenting editorially on the Bengal famine, the *Eastern Economist* wrote in its issue of November 5:—

The famine in Bengal is pursuing its relentless course and exacting daily its heavy toll of human lives. The nation has been stirred to its depths. The British Government unwilling to face up to the inconvenient fact of their own and the Government of India's responsibility have at least been driven by public opinion to take action which even now is very tardy. The basic principle of British administration which was also its pride and even boast was said to be that no human life would be allowed to perish on account of lack of food. Now loss of life is going on not in hundreds but in thousands each week; and yet neither the British Prime Minister nor the Secretary of State has given one reassuring word that they would bend all their energies to prevent the slaughter that is going on, due to man's incompetence and perversity. Here in India the Government have betrayed such an woeful lack of imagination and efficiency that they have allowed a situation to develop which has gone out of control. Mere Indianization of Executive Council has proved to be not merely futile but dangerous in creating a sense of complacency in the face of a major economic disaster. As long as the fountain of political power rests in Whitehall and is allowed to flow only to the Viceroy's Lodge, Indianization can afford no satisfaction to the public as it means nothing to the people in terms of their own welfare and happiness. Only a Government that derives its power and authority from the people can act boldly and make themselves felt with the British Government. One has only to recall what Mr Curtin, the Prime Minister of Australia, was able to extract from the Allied Nations by way of materials and equipment for the war to realize the helplessness of the Government of India to make any impression upon the British authorities.

The problem in India is far too serious to be solved by any piecemeal or patched-up measures. Bengal's famine is only a portent. Famine stalks all through the land and is not confined to Bengal, though it is seen at its worst in that province. In Travancore, Cochin and Malabar the situation is, if anything, worse than in Bengal, as the Dewan of Travancore has pointed out. In the Ceded Districts in Madras, in Orissa and in parts of Bombay conditions are as near famine as one can think of. It is not the scarcity of food during the last few months alone that has brought about this tragedy. The causes are more deep-seated; and unless the root causes are understood, a solution will not be easy.

The true causes of the tragedy that we are to witness lie in the methods of our war finance. Under the cloak of a glittering financial carpet covering, it is said, large reserves of sterling to India's benefit, the country has been depleted of its scanty resources of consumers' goods of all kinds. We have time and again repeated in the *Eastern Economist* that only after a minimum of basic needs is guaranteed to the Indian masses, should resources be drawn to war purposes either on our

own account or on British account. This is the A.B.C. of war finance in every country. No country, Britain or U.S.A., however much it may have drawn resources to war effort, has failed to guarantee the minimum standard of living. Indeed in Britain and U.S.A. the standard of food consumption has increased during the war. India is most unfortunate in its Finance Department which has had no understanding of the elements of the problem. No one would have grudged war efforts on a more gigantic scale, if our economy had been geared to a quick and revolutionary rise in the scale of our productive organization. The cry of those who have been laying emphasis on scarcity has been this: Produce more. The more you produce the more will be available for the purposes of the war after the basic civil needs are met. That cry went unheeded; and so today human tragedy is writ large on the face of this country which has done nothing to deserve this fate except perhaps its toleration of inefficient governments.

Were scarcity regional, it could be set right. Our old famine policy was based on regional scarcities combined with an over-all abundance or at least sufficiency over the whole country taken together. Two other assumptions both essential were also absolutely realized in practice. One was that foodgrains would move from the farthest corner of India to the famine-stricken area and every other thing would be subordinated to quick transport. Transport was our weapon of attack then; not the bottle-neck which it now is. The second assumption was that no matter where the foodgrains were, they could be got hold of and sent. India was one unit for administrative purposes. None of the assumptions on which successful famine policy was executed now hold good. There is over-all scarcity; the fact of availability of foodgrains in one part of India is no guarantee that it would be available elsewhere; nor is the willingness to send out grains any certainty that they would actually move because transport is deficient and often unavailable. Thus a number of little pools has grown up which have accentuated the problem of distribution.

In the light of the above facts we have to seek the remedies. The immediate problem is two-fold; to control the famine and prevent its appearance in the same or other regions. Control of famine can be effective only when adequate supplies are got hold of. The Governor of Bengal is no doubt right in saying that he has not sufficient supplies at hand to declare Bengal a famine area and take responsibility for famine relief. But the responsibility is there and must be faced whether you declare it a famine area or not. Imports in large quantity should flow continuously for they hold the key to the immediate solution. All available internal supplies should be governed, and this means that every part of India should work up loyally to a well-planned scheme of procurement. The *Aman* crop in Bengal is said to be good, but it is feared that there will not be enough labour for harvesting it on account of the flight or devitalization of much of the rural population. The only way of relieving this scarcity of labour is to divert the military to this task, and since a large number of our troops has been recruited from rural areas, it should be easy for them to engage in this operation. Lord Wavell who has started well in his career by requisitioning the military to

handle the problem of distribution and relief in affected areas should also direct the military to aid in harvesting operations.

Preventing the recurrence of famine requires a complete reversal of our financial and economic policies. The country should not be asked to undertake any further responsibility for feeding the armed forces quartered in India. A big production drive should be organized which will embrace the production of all kinds of essential food and other articles of necessity. India should be administered as one economic unit, and no amount of provincial autonomy should be allowed to make inroads into the economic integrity of India.

But the after-famine problem is even more important. The restoration and rehabilitation of the damaged economy of Bengal and other provinces will require all the co-ordinated efforts of every department of Government. For every one that dies, there are tens of persons who are enfeebled and debilitated. To restore them to conditions of normal health is no easy task. The pauperization of millions of people of the country will have a highly demoralizing effect. The effects of the vicious poor law of the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in England had been the undermining of the morale and efficiency of the English poor for nearly a hundred years. We cannot hope to build a strong, healthy and self-respecting nation on gruel kitchens. We must make our economy highly productive, the workers strong and efficient and build up our agricultural and industrial organization on a basis which would never permit scarcity and famine to re-appear. Our eyes have been opened as never before, to the extreme precariousness of our food economy and "Never Again" in war or in peace should be our aim. For this purpose our task is to prepare immediately a plan of re-employment of all labour that is seeking employment, putting our agriculture on a scientific basis and guaranteeing them food and other articles of necessity on a scale which will make up for the people's dietary deficiencies in the past.

Such a plan should embrace not merely a public works policy but a policy of planned rural development in which the Departments of Agriculture, Forests, Irrigation, Health would each contribute its share. To put it at the lowest, the wear and tear of labour on account of ill-nourishment and diseases should receive as much attention at least as the wear and tear of the machinery which is being excessively worked up. Failure to do this would mean that the next generation would consist of enfeebled and weak men and women. The cumulative effects of this vicious circle of famine, death enfeeblement, and therefore decline in production can easily be visualized. If India is going to solve her population problem in this wise by allowing millions to die hungry and naked, she would for ever have earned the just obloquy and disgrace at the bar of world opinion. India and her people are on trial. How quickly they act and bring under combat the forces of famine, scarcity and disease will be the test of their capacity. The Bengal famine is only a portent. The problem is all India and cannot be tackled on anything less wide than on a national basis and on a bold and imaginative scale.





## APPENDIX III

### THE AFTERMATH

*The following articles describing the situation in Bengal in the early beginning of 1944 were written by Mr T. D. Chandola, the special correspondent of the 'Hindustan Times,' and appeared in that paper in the months of January and February:*



## THE AFTERMATH

### MALARIA, CHOLERA AND DROPSY

Late in the afternoon of January 2, I left Kalicharanpur for Gokulnagar where I arrived at 10 a.m., passing through devastated fields overgrown with weeds, dotted with poisonous ponds which were full of saline water or sea-plants. On entering the village I learnt that about 36 people had recently died of cholera here. There was a burnt house in which one half-burnt human body was still rotting. A mother and her nine-year-old son had died of cholera in this house and the other eleven-year-old daughter and five-year-old son had left in search of food for unknown destination. The villagers set fire to the house in order to burn the two dead bodies lying inside the house. Starvation and malaria also had their full toll and out of a population of 5,000, nearly two thousand people are stated to have died of starvation, malaria and cholera till the end of December in this area and deaths are still occurring. In one family of nine, six had already died and the seventh was suffering; in another family of twelve, seven had died of malaria; in a third family of six, four had died of malaria and the remaining daughter and son were living in someone's house; one family of seven had been completely wiped out of existence by cholera; in another family of ten, eight died; while in a family of eight, seven died of malaria or cholera. In a family of eight, only a widow and her four-year-old daughter survive. More than 70 per cent. of the population is suffering from malaria. In the family of Arvind Das Adhikari, who is still in jail, five members are dead and only his wife survives. In one family of sixteen, eleven are dead, and in a third one, five are dead out of six. Almost all houses have been destroyed or damaged. A little girl of three years, who has no parents, had strayed into this village. driven by hunger, four months ago, while another pitiable case was of one married girl of hardly thirteen years, who could not be fed by her starving husband and had been deserted by him and left to her own fate, the whereabouts of the husband himself being unknown.

In Takhali Bazar I found that paddy weighing more than a thousand maunds, was being purchased at Rs. 7 a maund on behalf of some wholesale grain dealers of Calcutta, and was being loaded in boats. Whether this was a part of the procurement scheme or simply a manoeuvre of a clever profiteer having some powerful backing could not be said with certainty but the fact remains that large quantities of paddy were being purchased and exported from an area which had suffered so heavily from starvation and was not yet free from its death-grip. To add to this, I was told that the area had been declared a surplus area. It is very hard to understand the trend of these subtle operations in defiance of economic laws and social obligations.

It was a great relief to find here the Ramakrishna Mission per-

forming its duties towards the starving and malaria-stricken people in a spirit of service and sacrifice. The Mission was giving 23,000 doles to 5,337 families living in this neighbourhood, which was the worst affected by famine, food and disease and had the heaviest death-roll. It had given away 1,500 blankets and 6,150 pieces of clothes. It was also running a dispensary here, which, of course, had a good stock of medicines, unlike the empty dispensary of Gharchakra. About 3,500 patients per week were treated here before and now the number of patients treated was 1,500 per week. The Mission also caters to the cultural needs of the people of the neighbourhood by showing magic lantern slides and giving a series of lectures on the life of Ramakrishna and his disciple, Vivekananda, who today would have been shocked to see the people in the extreme misery and would have moved heaven and earth to save them from the grip of death, disease and hunger.

#### STARVING FOR TWO DAYS

Early on the following morning I set out for Sonachura and Gangra. Hardly had we stepped out when I saw one widow with her ten-month-old child clinging to her dry breast under a tree near the village pond, where the starving and unfortunate woman had passed the whole night in this cold weather. She had been driven out by her step-son after her husband had died of starvation. She was taken to the Ramakrishna Mission, where she was provided with food. Arjun Charan, a young but emaciated man of 25, of Jehanabad, whom I met on the way, had gone to Sundarbans for labour, but could not work owing to extreme weakness due to starvation. His days of life are now numbered. He had been starving for the last two days. Every house and everybody I came across had to unfold a story of starvation or malaria, which they thought had become their ordained lot. Barks of dogs attracted me towards the Talpatikhal where I found, to my horror, half a dozen dogs devouring the dead body of a woman, presumably dragged out by them from the stream. Here was a site on the bank which has been serving as a mass burial ground with no less than two dozen fresh graves tampered by jackals.

Soon I was in the village of Sonachura, once really the "gold dust" of Bengal, as its miles and miles of rice-fields, now covered with wild weeds, told the passing traveller. Here the people were still in the grip of starvation and malaria, rapidly losing their vitality, if they had any left at all, and all sense of a decent and healthy life. Out of a population of 3,000 more than a thousand people had died according to the popular estimates. All the 300 houses had been swept away excepting one pucca house. Forty families have ceased to exist. Out of 4,000 bighas hardly 150 bighas are now under cultivation, giving a yield of two maunds per bigha, instead of twelve before. Malaria and cholera are having their usual toll. Medicines or medical relief are not at all available. One Gribala Bera (16) was suffering from dropsy. She had been deserted by her starving husband in Talpat. She had come here for shelter in the home of her parents, who too

were suffering from dropsy and were in an unspeakable condition of wretchedness. They had neither food nor medicines and had given up all hopes of life in this world. In a family of eight, there was only one eleven-year-old boy surviving, while in another family of twelve, eight were dead either of cholera, malaria or starvation. Five died of beri-beri in another family of seven and only two little boys survive; while in a family of eight only one boy of eleven survives. All the nine members of Shrimanta Das's family have perished, while in another family of fourteen, twelve are dead. Everywhere one turns his attention, he finds suffering and misery and mourning. In one family the husband died, leaving a widow, three widowed or deserted daughters and four other children, who were absolutely naked. Since the stoppage of doles by the Ramakrishna Mission the family had been again living on rice-husk and vegetables or broken rice, if they could get it on any occasion by labour. I found Srihari Jana (26), who had suffered from starvation, in a very miserable condition. In order to save himself he had sold 23 bighas, out of 25 bighas of his land, for Rs. 1,000, but before he could have the benefit of his money, he was robbed by dacoits and he continued to starve, along with his five-year-old son. The culprits, I was told, could not be traced by the police. The distressed wife had to go to her parents to find a living. Srihari Jana was a man of some education and had been a well-to-do man in this neighbourhood. He and his son were now living in the cow-shed of a kind neighbour, who gives them occasional doles of food. Five men had died of starvation in his family.

#### NO 'AMAN' CROP

The village of Gangra had an equally distressing story to reveal. A few years before the flood this had been a flourishing village with rice being sold at Re. 1-4 per maund and milk at half anna a seer. But now the story is different. Out of a population of 650, more than 300 people were dead till the end of December, of whom 130, had perished in cyclone and the rest of starvation, malaria and cholera. Out of 177 houses, only one remains. Twenty-two families have been completely wiped out of existence. A twenty-foot high water-wall rushed inland at a terrific speed, the coastal steamer blowing the warning signal. All houses and trees disappeared with the sweep of waters and only on the following day the tops of palm trees were visible from a distance. All lands remained under five feet of water for two months. All fields were destroyed, resulting in the complete failure of the *aman* crop. Out of 1,900 bighas of land, hardly 100 bighas are under cultivation. Since the stoppage of doles by the Ramakrishna Mission, 40 families are again in a sad plight. There are about 100 widows and 25 orphans, depending entirely on charity. Whatever little there is of *aman* crop, it will be all exhausted in three or four months when the people will again find themselves overwhelmed by famine, unless some timely help arrives. No quinine is available here, although malaria is still having its toll. How miraculously Ganesh, was saved out of a family of eight members was revealed to me by the villagers. All the family was floating on a hut when it

dashed against an embankment and was smashed to pieces and all were drowned in the deluge, excepting this ten-year-old child, who caught hold of some other float which carried him to Takhali Bazar, three miles away, where he was rescued by the people. Udaipal had a family of eight all of whom died.

In a neighbourhood village of Brindaban Chak about 350 people died and 90 per cent. of the houses were destroyed, according to the version of the villagers. Only a widowed girl of eleven years was the surviving member in Mahadeva Bera's family of seven members. Malaria and cholera still continue in the village. About 100 people are reported to have died in Rainagar village of starvation, cholera, malaria and in cyclone. All the six members of the family of Kumar Jana died of cholera. Gopinath De had a family of five members, all of whom perished from cholera, while in Rambali Jana's family of nine members, only two are living and in Bhagwat Pariya's family of eleven members, only an old widow and a four-year-old child survive. In the village of Parulhari all the six members of the family of Kailash Mandal died, while in another family of four, only a ten-year-old boy survives. Nine died out of thirteen in another family. Almost every house had a death-roll.

I started on my journey to Babuya, where the Bengal Relief Committee had its milk canteen and proposed to have a medical relief centre. From Tarapekhia Ghat I took a boat to Panchkhali, whence I continued my journey on foot to the interior. Tarapekhia and Panchkhali are two important bazars in this area, where the villagers bring great vegetables and salt to sell and, in exchange, purchase rice, pulses or new earthenwares, spices, gur and kerosene oil. On our way to Panchkhali Bazar, where it was a market day with markets of vegetables, or some other produce, on their heads. Groups of destitutes, men, women and children were also hurrying on their way to the bazar in the hope of getting some tit-bits of these or a few pice from the visitors. At Chandipore, I noticed a destitutes' house run by the Ramakrishna Mission. There were about 75 destitutes, mostly widows and orphans.

#### ATE EARTH FOR FOOD

While approaching Babuya *via* Ishwarpur and Kasimpur I found human bones and cremation grounds here and there. At Kasimpur alone about 30 people had died recently. To Babuya had come from a distance of five miles a five-year-old girl, who had lost her father, in the hope of getting some alms. In Babuya about 300 people had died of starvation. In one family seven died of starvation. Sheikh Afzal and two other members of his family died of starvation, the remaining one, a young son, having disappeared in utter desperation. Their ruined hut revealed a tragic story of their starvation. Another family, of Sheikh Aman, was passing its days in misery living on vegetables and suffering from dropsy. Tunibala has been left a widow with her 10-month-old son, her husband and father-in-law having died of starvation. Khandi has been deserted by her starving husband who

himself has disappeared. In one family four died in extreme agony of starvation, when nothing was available they ate earth. Malaria and dropsy were prevailing in the village. When children in the village could not get food for days together and had to depend exclusively on vegetables and pumpkins or doles of *jowar* and *bajra* and *arvi*, which they did not at all like, they cried in agony, breaking the hearts of their parents, who themselves were starving. This was what a group of little children told me while giving their experience of the distress.

In the village of Serberia 58 died of starvation. Four families, of four to six members each, have been completely wiped out by death due to starvation, leaving behind their desolate huts as monuments of their utter helplessness and misery. In another family 14 died of starvation. In one family one young widow is the only survivor. In the village of Kulup about 300 people died, in one single family 11 having died of starvation. Malaria and cholera are not lagging behind in taking their toll of life. Some barbers have died of starvation and two families of barbers were starving as there was absolutely no work for them in the village both as a result of the disappearance of the menfolk through starvation and inability of the people to pay. In one family six had died of cholera. One well-to-do family, of Bhutnath Maiti, has been reduced to extreme poverty. In Digha village the starving family of seven, of whom one had succumbed, went out in search of food and there was no trace of any of them. Perhaps they died in the streets of Calcutta. Another four of a family have also disappeared. Six persons in one family were still starving. One young woman has been deserted by her husband in sheer desperation and there was no trace of him. The same story of distress was to be found in the neighbouring village of Pichaida also. Two surviving widows in a family had been starving for the last two days. One man disappeared in search of food when his starving wife was dead. One family was completely wiped out of existence by starvation; in another family of four the surviving one also has disappeared. When two were dead in a third family as a result of agonizing starvation, the remaining couple and their child went out in search of food and perhaps died in the streets of Calcutta. Two other desolate homesteads emerged before our view which too revealed a distressing story of unimaginable distress. All their five occupants, driven by extreme hunger, went out and never returned. Sagrichak village revealed a similar story of distress, misery and disease. While going round the villages of Pichaida, Gholda, Digha, Kulun, Sagrichak and Kasimpur we observed about 10 square miles of uncultivated lands and shocking misery and poverty which had virtually prostrated the entire population. Doles for one thousand persons had been distributed by the Arya Samaj for two weeks in this area, which gave the starving population a little breathing time. But since the stoppage of all relief, people have been again starving.

#### MASS STARVATION

In Kothad village about one thousand people are stated to have died of starvation. Emaciated figures of men, women and children



presented a pathetic picture of extreme misery. They could neither feed themselves nor their children. The shocking sight of their hungry children crying for a few crumbs of rice shattered their helpless mothers' hearts, who, in their extreme agony, disappeared in wilderness where their dear children's pathetic cries for food might not torment and pierce their broken hearts. Only four days ago one mother when she could not get any food for her crying five-year-old son, Harishud-cin, disappeared in utter despondency and desperation.

In Kulapara village seven persons of one family had been starving for the last three days, one boy having left the house in utter asperation. Another family of eight, in which three were already dead through starvation, had been again starving since the closing down of the gruel kitchen.

About 300 people are stated to have died in the village of Batnua as a result of starvation. There were about 50 deserted huts here, the starving inmates of which had gone out in search of food and had never returned. When his father died starving Gunadhar Maiti went away in desperation only to be followed later by his equally helpless wife. When five of his family were dead in this virtual epidemic of starvation, Karitka Chandra Manna deserted his house and disappeared. When for months together they had been starving, Sheikh Hattam, his wife and two children quitted the village and went to Calcutta in search of food and today there was no trace of them. In one family one five-year-old girl survives. When Khudiram Jana and his two children were dead, the surviving widow, driven by hunger, disappeared—where no one knows.

#### MESSAGE OF CHARKHA

This area has been having floods continuously for the last four years as a result of which the population has been in extreme misery and poverty. Year after year the *aman* crop has been a failure and the people have been either living on vegetables or starving. Barbers and washermen have lost their business, the mainstay of their living, and have no work to do as the starving people have no money or paddy to give them for the luxuries of washing and shaving and a large number of people is dead. Half a dozen helpless widows, who had absolutely no work to do and were starving from day to day, asked in desperation, if there was any way in which they could be saved from starvation. They did not know spinning, but they were willing to learn it if they could be provided with the *charkha* and cotton and taught to spin and weave. They were Muslim widows. But these helpless Muslim widows did envy the lot of the Hindu widows and those of the families living in the neighbourhood who had taken advantage of the constructive programme of the Congress and owned a *charkha* and were on that account better off than themselves. If spinning and weaving centres, as also orphanages, could be opened here much abiding benefit could be rendered to the rural population. I am told that some years ago there was here a branch of the All-India Spinning Association which had achieved considerable success in popularizing the

*harkha*. But now the branch was not functioning for want of workers and supplies. The *charkha*, the population has found to its advantage, is a potential economic factor in ameliorating their lot and it does occupy a place of honour in several homesteads, spreading the message of hope and self-reliance all around more demonstrably and effectively than ever in the midst of this havoc of starvation.

On our way back to Tamluk, we saw the villages of Ghazipur, Dautpur and Attata having travelled 18 miles on foot and 12 miles by bus. The countryside had almost the same story to reveal of destruction and devastation. We returned to Tamluk at night with the dismal picture of desolation in the villages of Nandigram police station deeply impressed on our hearts and the pathetic cries of starving and semi-nude population, stricken with malaria and cholera, haunting and pursuing us.

#### PEOPLE EATING PADDY-HUSK

CALCUTTA, (By Mail).

Dogs and vultures enjoyed abundant prosperity, while the mass of the human population were plunged in shocking misery in Makrami Chak, Jagannath Chak, Negi-Bheri, Andolia, etc. (Midnapore subdivision), the group of villages I visited in the third week of December, covering a distance of 17 miles on foot and by boat and returning to our camp at Kapsada at night with the dreadful picture of naked and starving humanity deeply impressed on our mind. No words can describe the extremely wretched condition to which the people of this part of the country have been reduced. To live in such miserable frustration is the surest and speediest way to complete annihilation of the population *en masse*.

Is it not a blot on modern civilization that it should be callously blind to this part of the country, where people are dying from starvation and disease, where children go naked even in winter and men and women have to cover some parts of their body with rags in order to hide their shame, where children as well as adults are compelled by the pangs of hunger to resort to begging from place to place and the whole population has been turned into so-called destitutes? Deserted huts, decaying homesteads and destroyed fields reveal a stunning story of desolation.

#### PEOPLE EATING RICE-HUSK

Despite the destruction wrought by floods the people still pathetically cling to their submerged lands and destroyed huts which they treasure greatly, depending on the scanty yield of the *Boro* crop, which is cultivated in the neighbourhood of tanks and is harvested in April. There is absolutely no *Aman* crop, the biggest and the main rice crop of the year, in the flooded areas. Even if the people of these flooded villages wish to go elsewhere they cannot do so as they have not the means. So, knowing too well their precarious existence, the economic and social forces compel them to remain on the edge of death. Only a bold scheme or replanning of rural economy, which might be within the realm of possibility if a truly National Government were function-

ing, could help and save them. Until then their lot is sealed. That people can eat rice husk (which is usually eaten by cattle and horses or is thrown away) by mixing it with a mere sprinkling of broken pieces of rice, if one is lucky to find them, is shocking. To what extremes of misery the starving people have been driven! This is not at all an exaggeration but a fact that I have observed. Parents have forsaken their children owing to their inability to feed them and the helpless little kiddies tramp from place to place in search of food. Aged and hungry parents anxiously wait for the return of their son, gone ten miles away to labour for the sake of three annas at the maximum *plus* a little food, and sometimes coming back empty-handed to the disappointment and despondency of his starving family who have then to depend on husk and vegetables. If little children return successfully from their begging expedition with half a pound of rice, the distressed family feels the thrill and excitement of winning a Derby!

While on our way to Mukrami Chak from Kamarpatta along the embankment we met Uttami, a widow (30), and a married girl, Kamala (16), of Shankarpur (Contai), begging from door to door. They had lost their all and had nothing to eat at home and had to resort to begging. Another widow (21), had an aged mother at Makrami Chak where their house had been destroyed; she was going out in search of food which they could not have for the last two days. On arriving at Mona Madhaya Chak we learnt that a labourer, who had been driven from pillar to post in search of food, had at last died of dropsy in the morning, leaving a widow and two children. Crossing over to Makrami Chak, a ruined village, we went from hut to hut and saw for ourselves the appalling wretchedness to which the people of this locality have been reduced by flood and famine in one sweep. Every family, without exception, had its distressing story of woe and suffering.

#### GOVERNMENT RELIEF STOPPED

The women and children of this locality had been receiving their gruel from the Government gruel kitchen until December 15, when all the Government gruel kitchens in this sub-division were closed and helpless villagers began to starve again. Makrami Chak and Jagannath Chak adjoin each other and have a population of 1,219 people out of whom 550 units (two children make one unit), mostly women and children, had been getting gruel. These villages are being flooded for the last six years with the result that they have not been having the main rice crop at all during these six years and they have nothing to eat and no clothes to cover themselves. They have now to depend on the *Boro* crop, which is to be harvested in April, and till then they will have to starve or drag on a miserable existence by eating vegetables and rice husk. It is suggested that either the Government should reopen its gruel kitchen or any other relief committee should open a centre here until the *Boro* crop is harvested. Further, arrangements should also be made for the free distribution of *Boro* seed immediately. We found that houses and fields of most of the people had been acquired for the Kalaighai widening scheme last year and most of them

have yet to receive their compensation for the acquired lands from the Government. Prasanna Maha Maish (46), was unable to work owing to extreme weakness due to starvation and illness and his new-born baby may not live for want of milk. The house and field of Shiva Prasad Misra (60) have been destroyed and his widowed daughter and her four sons have come to him for shelter after having lost their all in Contai. In one single family five have died of starvation. The interior of the huts we visited reveals the miserable plight of the people. They had absolutely no clothes and the few rags that men and women could manage to get for covering some parts of their body were so dirty that one would not touch them. Some women were unable to get these rags even in sufficient width and one has to drop down his head in sheer shame greatly afflicted by the misery of these people. Like dogs and goats they huddle together in their dark, dingy and withering huts, having but the last straws sparsely put together, in these winter nights. Some families got an anna per day by making salt by their crude method. There were many instances in which men were found suffering from the after-effects of starvation and some were about to die of starvation. Several families have been deprived of their earning members and the widows and orphans have been left to their own fate. Bishwanath Ghorai died leaving a widow and four children (7, 5, 3, 1) and the widow too is about to die. In Makrami Chak and Jagannath Chak about 60 people are reported to have died of starvation. In the afternoon about 200 people from these villages came weeping to the place where we were halting and entreated us in the most touching and pathetic manner to save them from the claws of starvation and misery. Everyone had some heart-rending story of utter distress, even the remotest semblance of which in any part of the Western world would have resulted in volleys of indignation and anger.

#### STARVING FOR DAYS

On our return journey by the Kalaighai embankment we saw Neji-Bheri where five people had died of starvation out of a population of 120. One family, whose house had been destroyed by the cyclone, depended on rice husk mixed with vegetables and little of broken rice. Since the discontinuance of the gruel kitchen, I was told, many had to depend on green vegetables only and that they would have to do so until April when in some cases *Boro* crop might be available. Four families had been starving for the last two days. In one case a widow was starving as her weak son (21) had not sufficient strength to labour. In another family of four, the mother had gone out to beg and the starving family was patiently waiting for her return.

Towards evening we arrived at Hijla, which, along with the neighbouring villages of Andolia or Lochanpur and Pagoria Shyamkishore, had yet another story of woe to unfold to our stunned hearts. These areas have been having a succession of floods for years and have been virtually swinging on the precipice of death and desolation. No less than 100 people are stated to have died from starvation in this neighbourhood, having a population of about 200 people. Many

have left the villages in sheer despondency and dread of approaching annihilation. These people have not been having any *Aman* crop for the last 20 years owing to floods, which assumed terrific proportion this year engulfing the whole neighbourhood, fields and all, barring the houses on embankments, in 12 feet or more deep water. In Lochanpur all houses have been damaged. Going from hut to hut we found Jagannath Ghorai dying of beri-beri. His mother, wife and daughter had died from starvation already. He was unable to move and beg and was gradually sinking. Gopal Ghorai died a month ago of starvation, leaving a wife and four children (eldest 10 years) who also were starving. They had absolutely no crops, nor do they expect any *Boro* crop. The little children had collected half a pound of rice, by begging, for a family of five. Behari Ghorai, his wife and son died, leaving two sons (10 and 2), the elder one had gone begging. In Lochanpur one 16-year-old girl is the solitary figure in a family, her parents having died of starvation, leaving behind their mother, wives and two children in helpless miserable condition. They have no house and no crops. A family of 8 had lost 3 members and the remaining five were also starving. The story of a helpless man aged 65, Mahendsa Karan, is equally tragic. He had lost his wife, his only support, and was now himself starving, being unable to move. Until December 15, the starving people of this neighbourhood could get their raw ration from the Government free centre, but as these free kitchens or stores have now been closed in this part the helpless people are again starving.

#### ONE LAKH DEATHS IN TAMLUK SUB-DIVISION ALONE

CALCUTTA, (By Mail)

Heart-rending scenes of desolation and devastation marked our way as we travelled from village to village in the Sutahata circle, the riverine and coastal villages revealing the most shocking picture of distress. We have just completed a ten-day tour in Sutahata and Mahishadal police stations, travelling 118 miles on foot, 56 miles by steamer and 44 miles by bus and seeing about 90 villages. No less than 25,000 people are dead in Sutahata and 15,000 in Mahishadal in the devastation wrought by famine, flood and disease. The popular estimates, however, place these mortality figures as high as 30,000 and 20,000 respectively. The total death-roll in the sub-division of Tamluk is well over one lakh. In Radhaballabh Chak, a village in Sutahata, about 66 per cent. of the population was dead, while in some villages half the population was dead. Cattle have suffered almost total extinction in the riverine and coastal villages, causing great loss to agriculture.

Human skulls and bones, corpses still being eaten by dogs and vultures, desolated homestead in which the last dying inmates had been devoured by jackals and dogs, miles of uncultivated lands overgrown with wild weeds, uprooted trees and ruined huts, numerous cremation and burial places haunted by dogs and vultures, family after family stricken with malaria, dropsy or cholera, or still suffering from starvation in these days of 'bumper crop,' orphans and widows

with none to take care of them, most shocking specimens of distressed humanity,—all these we came across on our way. The climax of the shock was reached when we saw dogs and vultures devouring a dead body of a young girl, who had died of malaria that very day in Radhaballabh Chak, and whose body, as her brother and husband could not cremate, was thrown in the *khal*. They could not generally cremate their dead bodies on account of their poverty, helplessness and lack of firewood and simply threw their dead in the *khal* or a river, if one was near, or in the fields, where these were quickly disposed of by dogs and vultures. Last rites to the dead were not observed anywhere. That is why we see a large number of human skulls and bones lying here and there. A well-to-do family, which had a big house and six *bighas* of land, was now in such great distress that it could not cremate the dead body of a 19-year-old boy who had died of malaria in Radhaballabh Chak the previous day and had to throw the dead body in the *khal*, where it was eaten by jackals and cogs. During the famine this family of 15 members had to live on one seer of rice per day with the result that the entire family starved. The head of the family could not bear the sight of starving children and collapsed. Later eight of the family died one after the other. Two of the members, young children, were still suffering from malaria. To this part of the country, as also to other *ccasta* villages malaria or an epidemic was unknown in previous years and, in fact, it was considered a health-resort by people living in the upper regions of Bengal. But now malaria and cholera are taking a heavy toll here. Salvation, saline water, with which the ponds are full, as also the rotten doles supplied at some centres, are stated to be the root causes of these epidemics. Family after family has disappeared in this devastation.

#### ANOTHER FAMINE APPREHENDED

In Sutahata, hardly 25 per cent. land is under cultivation, while in Mahalsdal, 50 per cent. Despite this harvest, the landless class is still suffering and starving for want of employment and the lot of these people is extremely miserable. Partially they had been depending on free doles from relief committees, most of which, rather all, were now withdrawing this relief in order to chalk out new plans of an abiding character for the rehabilitation of the rural population and thereby enable the people to stand on their own legs, as also to conserve their efforts for combatting yet another famine which threatens to overwhelm the people towards the end of April. This gradual withdrawal of relief has alarmed the starving people who find, to their discomfiture, dark days ahead. The scanty yield of the last *aman* crop is not expected to last beyond April, when people, panick-stricken as they are, again apprehend a famine as catastrophic as that of the last year. How to meet that impending disaster is the problem before the vitally affected people as also before the relief committees, although the power-that-be would, for their own reasons, refuse to recognize the existence of such unmistakable signs as indicate ominously the approach of yet another famine as sweeping in devastation as the previous one. In Goenkhal, the most important

rice market in this area, the price of rice had shot up to Rs. 18-8 per maund on January 23, Rs. 5 higher than the controlled price, while in the 24-Parganas of Howrah district the prevailing price of rice on January 29, according to reports in Goenkhali was between Rs. 20 and Rs. 21 per maund with still an upward tendency. Three or four days earlier, the weekly export of rice from Goenkhali at the rising price of Rs. 18-8 was 6,000 maunds. This upward tendency in price, however had spread a panic among the afflicted people. The phenomenon was that while this price was reeling at Geonkhali and a still higher price in 24-Parganas the poor peasant in the interior was selling his paddy in order to fulfil some of his pressing needs, at the dictated cheap price of Rs. 6 or Rs. 6-8 a maund to the agents of wholesale paddy merchants. If the price of paddy is Rs. 6, the reasonable price of rice is Rs. 9 a maund. Thus when his small stock of paddy is exhausted by the end of April, he will have to pay double the price or much more for repurchasing rice. Three days later in Geonkhali, however, the grain merchants held a hurried conference as a result of awakened official activity and brought down the price to Rs. 14-4 a maund with the not unexpected consequence that rice began to disappear quickly from the market and on January 30, there were hardly 250 maunds of rice instead of the normal daily supply of 1,000 maunds. That is to say, with the available stock of rice for sale in the open market, the price, as a result of the inevitable operation of the law of supply and demand, will shoot to higher and higher as the supplies go on dwindling and the demand goes on increasing, or else with the enforcement of control measures the supplies of rice will disappear from the open market and go to the black market, hitting the people both ways to their misfortune. Thus it is obvious to those who will choose to see that the lot of the people is doomed once again and the authorities will only realize the gravity of the situation when they find one day, not to their cost, but to the grief of the populace, that the people are once again overwhelmed by yet another catastrophic famine. The impending distress can be mitigated if the authorities realize the situation right now and plan an effective and abiding scheme of relief and speedy rehabilitation in close co-operation with the public agencies which, may it be said to their credit, have done so much in relieving distress in Bengal. We were surprised to learn that although people were still in the grip of starvation, demands were being made on them so soon to return the loans advanced to them by way of relief and in consequence of this pressure, as also of the fear that their little stock of rice may be taken away on the ground of its being surplus, the needy villagers are selling away their paddy at Rs. 6 or Rs. 6-8 per maund in the interior. The demand for the repayment of agricultural loans, therefore, must immediately be withdrawn and held in abeyance until the population is completely rehabilitated and is able to stand on its own legs.

Tamluk, or Tamlapatra, which during the time of Huen Tsang's visit was rolling in wealth, is in ruins today. Whatever had remained of its old glory, in the shape of dying trade and industry and agricul-

tural crops, has been swept away by famine, cyclone and floods. The demon of famine had the people already under its grip before cyclone and floods came on them and killed many of them outright, destroying with a devastating sweep village after village, along the coastal belt in particular. In Tamluk sub-division alone no less than 60,000 people are dead, according to a cautious estimate of the people, and the death-roll is mounting up every day. Nandigram, Satahata and Mahaishdal police stations have been the worst sufferers. In the police station of Nandigram alone, which has a population of 1,47,949 and consists of 255 villages, more than 30,000 people have perished and more are still dying of starvation, malaria and cholera.

#### EVERY FAMILY IN MOURNING

I have just returned after an extensive nine-day tour of the Nandigram police station, having travelled more than 90 miles on foot, besides 56 miles by bus and 22 miles by boat. In the 60 villages I saw, almost every family has been in continuous mourning for successive deaths. Even the bloodiest of wars could not have wrought such havoc as we witnessed here. Village after village has vanished leaving no trace behind of its previous existence. Mud-houses have been swept away like dust, and thousands of people with their cattle and belongings have perished in this triple tragedy of famine, flood and disease. No less than 200 square miles of fertile fields have been turned into land of wild growth. Those who have read the story of the *Last Days of Pompeii* will notice that some villages here have had a fate worse than that of Pompeii, and there is no Tagore to immortalize their history. Nagchar, like some other coastal-belt towns, has been totally destroyed. Only barren fields and levelled sites of houses remain as the relic of this once so prosperous locality.

Arriving at Tamluk on the night of December 30, we left for Muhammadpur in the early hours of the following morning, travelling 12 miles by bus and 16 miles by boat. Mr Prahlad Pramanik, Secretary of the Mahendra Relief Committee, was also with us. While on our way, we saw seven ruined villages. No less than 2,000 people were dead in the area, and 25 per cent. of the remaining population was almost on the verge of death. In Sripur, 80 people died out of 200, and almost all houses were destroyed. Milmani Mandal had a family of six members and now only a 15-year-old daughter remains in a helpless condition, while all the seven members of Hari Mandal's family are dead. In Dinbandhupur, almost half the population is dead. Out of a population of 800, hardly 400 remain. All the 22 members of the family of Bhagwat Jha are dead, while out of 24, 22 members of the family of Ramnath Maiti died in the cyclone, a woman and a boy having a miraculous escape. In Basulichak, more than half the population is dead, 300 dying out of 500, according to the popular estimate. Out of five members in the family of Joti Jha, a 5-year-old son remains. Joti Jha's body was eaten away by jackals and dogs in his house, as there was none to dispose it of. But cases of this type are in such abundance here that this is but treated as the common lot of the unfortunate people. In Kandapasra, out of 500 people 200 are dead. Two families have ceased to exist, while in another a 5-year-old son remains. In



Bhrikutia 150 people died out of 1,200 and all houses were destroyed or damaged. All the eight members of Dharnidhar Panda's family died, while in the family of Bansidhar Panda only a 3-year-old child remains. In another family of seven, five have died and a widow and a child remain. One Khatuma Bibi has been deserted by her starving husband, who has disappeared, perhaps lost his life in the streets of Calcutta.

#### THE DELUGE

We arrived in Mohammadpur in the afternoon when still deeper desolation came to our view. Even the pucca buildings of the mosque and the dispensary could not stand the fury of the tidal wave. In this entire area, out of 12,000 people, 4,000 had died till the end of December as a result of famine, flood and disease. About 200 families have ceased to exist altogether. The number of cattle killed in the floods is more than 8,000 and that of goats 3,000. In Mohammadpur village itself out of a population of 2,100, about 1,000 were dead till the end of December; out of 436 houses only 18 remain; 15 families have been completely wiped out of existence, while out of 1,000 bighas of land only 100 bighas are now cultivated. While the famine was having its toll of human lives all round and the starving people were sustaining themselves at the prospect of a good *aman* crop, a 21 feet high tidal wave overwhelmed them with destruction and desolation. It was at midday that the deluge came, and had it come at midnight all the inhabitants would have perished and none would have remained to tell the story of this deluge, unprecedented in the history of the areas. The tidal wave, which was 21 feet high near the coastal regions and seven feet high about 12 miles inland, swept away everything in its wild and destructive course, when people were already in the fatal grip of starvation. Earlier on October 16 as also on the previous day there was stormy weather. At midday the weather was a little calmer when people were puzzled to hear the deafening roars of the wild sea let loose on the land, and in another moment a 21-foot high wall of sea rushing inland with all its fury came to view, as if the entire seaboard had been overturned. Most of the people, however, saved their lives by getting to the top floor of the pucca houses or catching hold of trees or floating huts.

The cyclone and the tidal wave aggravated the starvation due to famine and were followed by malaria and cholera. These wrought havoc among the bewildered population.

Later in the afternoon we saw the surrounding villages. We saw the desolated hut of Bhagyadhar Mandal who had a family of five, all of whom died of starvation—even a 5-year-old child, not being able to get a morsel of food. The dead bodies of Gangadhar Mandal and Bhagyadhar Mandal were eaten by jackals and dogs. In another house we found Anurudh Das (25), who had starved for several days and after exhaustion was now suffering from dropsy and malaria, with his helpless wife attending on him. They were in rags. Bhagwatdas, his wife, mother and two sons, all perished from starvation, and so did Girish Manna's family of five. Another Gangadhar Mandal had a family of seven members and 14 bighas of land and a good house; all of them fell victims to death by starvation and their fields and house

were destroyed. Kailash Das's entire family of six had starved to death. In another family of Rama Jana, 25 had died out of 32.

As we proceeded on our way we saw miles of uncultivated land, as far as the eye could go, with a luxuriant growth of wild grass, desolated home-steads and huts lying in ruins, people suffering from malaria and dropsy, in almost every house. In Nayachok, we found two young Muslim women whose husbands, being unable to find food for themselves and their wives, had disappeared and they have not yet returned. Only one child was the surviving member in Sheikh Mehar's family of four. In Rajaramchak, a large portion of the male population was dead. Subhan Shah and his daughter died, leaving a young widow who is now living with her mother in Nayachak. In Muhammadpur we also heard the fearful story that about 14 dead cattle still lie buried under the debris of a house belonging to Manmathanath Das. We passed our night at Muhammadpur and the following morning we visited some parts of Purushottampur village and witnessed the distressing scenes there also.

We saw about 400 people receiving their doles of  $2\frac{1}{2}$  seers of rice per week at the Bengal Relief Committee's centre at Muhammadpur. Those who received their doles of jowar and bajra from the Government Relief Centre, managed by the Muslim League, were rather dissatisfied and envied those who received their doles of rice at the Bengal Relief Committee's centre. Children, without exception, were naked and the rest of the people hardly even half-clothed and that too by the relief afforded by several agencies. On the previous day we also saw in Muhammadpur the Government destitutes' house and gruel kitchen, where we found almost every inmate emaciated and suffering from some kind of disease even after two months' relief carried on by this centre. The man in charge of the kitchen was himself suffering from malaria. When we asked a small child, who had been suffering from malaria, if she was getting any milk, she told us that she did get milk but it was without sugar! There was also a dispensary, which could dispense with patients but not medicines. It was, however, a relief to learn that the Bengal Relief Committee was shortly opening a medical centre here, and the news was welcomed by the malaria-stricken people of this area, who, we may add, placed greater reliance and confidence on private relief committees than on those managed by Government.



## APPENDIX IV

### □ NOTE ON FOOD SITUATION IN INDIA

*(Statement supplied by the Government of India to the  
Legislature during the November session, 1943)*

### □ CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE FOODGRAINS POLICY COMMITTEE



# A NOTE ON THE FOOD SITUATION IN INDIA

[STATEMENT SUPPLIED TO THE CENTRAL LEGISLATURE  
DURING THE NOVEMBER SESSION, 1943.]

**Food Supply Position.**—Normally India is a net importer of food-grains. She has a small surplus in wheat offset by a much larger deficit in rice to the extent of 1,500,000 tons. Bulk of the other cereals such as *bajra*, *jowar*, maize, minor millets, barley and gram are consumed within the country. The total cereal production in India during 1942-43 was about 52.1 million tons as against the normal production of the same grains of 51.5 million tons, showing an excess of 0.6 million tons (*vide* details below). This increase was offset by the loss of Burma rice imports of about a million and a half tons, the demand in respect of the Defence Services of 650,000 tons and the export commitment to Ceylon and Persian Gulf countries to the extent of about 300,000 tons. There was thus a gap of 2 to 2½ million tons in the total foodgrain supply within the country. The central feature of the supply position was, however, the relatively larger shortage of rice consequent on the fall in the domestic production and the loss of Burma rice imports. The latter were consumed in the industrial cities of Bombay, Calcutta, Madras and States of Travancore and Cochin, and these areas were particularly harder hit by the relative shortage in the total supply of foodgrains as compared to the other areas.

	Normal production.	Production 1942-43.
	(In Million Tons)	
' Rice .. ..	26.5	24.5
Wheat .. ..	10.2	11.0
Bajra—Jowar ..	9.2	10.3
Maize .. ..	2.0	2.5
Gram .. ..	3.6	3.8

2. **Market Supply Position.**—Although the gap in the total cereal supply was statistically less than 4 per cent., the flow of supplies of foodgrains normally coming to the market had dried up in much greater proportion owing to a number of factors. These were the shock administered to public confidence by developments in the Eastern theatres of war; hoarding on a large-scale by consumers, traders and cultivators alike (cultivators in the hope of a further rise in prices, traders with the prospect of speculating against a rising market and consumers as a safeguard against any dislocation in future supplies); expansion of currency, the rising trend of commodity prices and consequent desire to hoard foodgrains in preference to the rupee notes; increase in the consumption of the cultivators who, after a decade of unrelieved depression of prices which compelled them to live on a near subsistence-level, realized better prices; a relatively greater pressure on transport. In addition to all these factors, political troubles contributed to the reduction of the flow of supplies to markets.

As a result the chief barometer of economic conditions, *viz.*, prices

**AMERY DISOWNS RESPONSIBILITY  
FOR THE FAMINE IN INDIA**

**HE TAKES WATER  
AND WASHES  
HIS HANDS**



*The Hindustan Times*, 24-10-1943.

indicated the deterioration in the market supply position. Foodgrains prices began to soar rapidly and in some places reached levels at which it was impossible for the average consumer to satisfy his minimum food requirements. The average price of rice in Calcutta rose from Rs. 4-8-0 per maund in 1939 to about Rs. 34-0-0 in August 1943. The price of wheat rose from Rs. 3-0-0 per maund in 1939 to Rs. 11-0-0 in August 1943 at Lyallpur. The price of *bajra* increased from Rs. 3-8-0 per maund to over Rs. 6-0-0 in May 1943 in the main producing areas.

3. *The Government Policy in relation to the Food Situation.*—It is by no means true that the Central or the Provincial Governments remained mere spectators of the situation. On the production side, realizing that the loss of Burma rice imports would cause serious difficulties, the Government of India inaugurated a "Food Production Drive" as early as April 1942. It was enthusiastically supported by Provincial and State Administrations. The main plank on which the Food Production Drive was based were the substitution of area under money crops like cotton to food crops and the distribution of manure, improved seed and better facilities with a view to improve yields. In 1942-43 as much as 8,000,000 additional acres were brought under foodgrains as compared to 1941-42, but the increase in production was not commensurate with the increase in acreage, due mainly to adverse weather conditions such as the cyclone on the east coast which damaged the rice crops of Bengal and parts of Orissa and the failure of monsoons in Madras and Bombay which affected the millets crops. On the distribution side, the Government of India convened conferences of Provincial and State Governments' representatives to review the food and price situation and to take such measures as were necessary to keep the situation under control. It is important to remember that, in view of a decade of depression through which the agriculturist had passed before the outbreak of war, as late as December 1941 any rise in agricultural prices was hailed with a sigh of relief rather than anxiety by all sections of population. The Central Government, however, was alive to the reactions of rise in foodgrains prices on the position of the industrial wage earner, apart from its inflationary dangers, and decided to control the prices of wheat in December 1941 and imposed a maximum ceiling on the price of wheat in April 1942. While the existence of a statutory maximum slowed the pace of further rise in foodgrain prices, it led to many serious difficulties such as the emergence of black market, driving of stocks underground and the creation of artificial scarcity even in the markets of producing areas such as the Punjab and the United Provinces.

A word is necessary about the limitations of any food-cum-price control policy which are inherent in the Indian situation. The marketable surplus of ~~foodgrains~~ foodgrains produced in India consist, by and large, of the small margins of production over consumption of 50 to 55 million cultivators who normally live on a very meagre standard of nutrition. Any increase in their money income tends to result in increased consumption and proportionate decrease in the marketable surplus. India grows her own food and, unlike a country which



imports the bulk of its food requirements and can therefore establish physical control over the foodgrain supply at a few ports, the points at which control will have to be established in India cover almost every farm and field wherever cereals are grown. The bulk of the cereals that the cultivator grows also go into direct consumption and a very small fraction of the rice and wheat goes through the normal processing stage (flour mills) as in the West which renders it difficult to control supplies at the processing stage. Unless conditions are such that the cultivator has no incentive to hold back his supplies such as a constant increase in commodity prices resulting from monetary expansion and unless the distributive machinery is prepared to play its own part fairly and well under the control scheme it is clear that there is no alternative but requisitioning on a very large scale directly from the cultivators—a course which is fraught with serious political risks. While this is true on the supply side, it is also not easy to control the demand of consumers and to prevent consumer-hoarding by country-wide rationing in rural as well as urban areas, because the Provincial and State administrations are not yet equipped for such an ambitious undertaking.

The growing complexity of the food situation led to the creation of a separate Department of Food in December 1942. The main problem before the Department on its creation was the existence of black-markets on a very large scale and drying up of supplies from markets in most of the producing centres. The Department, therefore, decided to abandon the control over the price of wheat from January 25, 1943—a step which led to an immediate rise in the price of wheat from the control price of Rs. 5 to Rs. 12 but, at the same time, attracted supplies to the market which enabled the Central Government to purchase about 186,000 tons. The Food Department called two conferences of Provinces and States and decided to formulate a 12-month plan of distribution of the available surpluses as between the different deficit areas. The major premise on which the Food Department made its plan was the principle that the gap in the supply of rice caused by the stoppage of Burma rice imports must be borne equally by all administrations and, wherever necessary, it should be substituted by other grains such as *bajra* and *jowar*. The formula asked the Provinces and States to be content with less than their normal consumption so that all could have equal cut in their consumption instead of some areas like Bombay, Travancore, Cochin, Madras and Bengal bearing the brunt of the loss of Burma imports. The plan of the Food Department known as the Basic Plan came into operation from April 1, 1943. Under the Plan over a period of 12 months it was expected to procure about 4,000,000 tons of foodgrains from the surplus areas on behalf of the Central Government and distribute this quantity amongst the deficit areas. The Basic Plan operated only for a period of 3½ months from April to July 15, 1943. During this period as much as 1,241,000 tons of foodgrains were despatched to various deficit areas and the Defence Services. Out of this quantity Bengal, Bombay, Madras and Travancore|Cochin received about 255,000 tons, 278,000 tons, 90,000 tons and 143,000 tons respectively. Although the Basic

Plan failed of its major objective of planning in advance the procurement and distribution of foodgrain surpluses over a period of 12 months throughout the country, it is important to note that the quantities delivered under the Plan during the period of its operation were by no means small. While the Plan operated, with a fair measure of success, in regard to areas like Bombay, Madras, Travancore|Cochin, it completely failed to ensure a planned supply of foodgrains to the major deficit area, viz., Bengal in the North-Eastern Region, due largely to the inability of the supplying administrations of that region to fulfil their obligations to Bengal under the Plan. Bengal was expected to get a quota of about 800,000 tons over a period of 12 months. The bulk of this quota of rice and millets was to go from Bihar, Assam, Orissa and United Provinces. As these areas found it impossible to fulfil even a fraction of their obligation for fear of aggravating their own difficulties, the Bengal food position became very acute. There was a time when Calcutta was reported to have a few days' stock on hand and the Government of India were compelled to make a major reversal policy by declaration of the whole of the North-Eastern Region of Assam, Bihar, Bengal, Orissa and Eastern States as a free trade zone. There is no doubt that this step which was a departure from all the accepted ideas of control during war saved Bengal for some time. It, however, cannot be denied that the abandonment of control over movement from one Province to another within this Region, and control over prices acted as a stimulating drug to the appetite of profiteers and hoarders who entered the markets, accumulated stocks and held them or sold them in the black-market in anticipation of still higher prices and profits. The Bengal Government found that every additional supply could only be procured at a still higher price. While this was true of Bengal, the prices in other units like Bihar, Assam and Orissa soared up and inflicted hardship on the local population. The Government of India, therefore, reviewed the whole position and after consulting the Provinces and States decided to abrogate the free trade experiment. It also appointed the Long-term Foodgrains Policy Committee first under the chairmanship of Mr Vigor, the Food Adviser, and then Dr Sir Theodore Gregory, the Economic Adviser, to report on an appropriate food policy for the duration of war for the country. The Revised Basic Plan, based on the declared surpluses of Provinces and States, was issued to be operative from August 1, 1943. Quotas in respect of rice and millets were fixed for four months, August to November, and for eight months, August to March, in respect of wheat and gram. The Revised Basic Plan aimed at a distribution of 1,400,000 tons as between the deficit areas and the Defence Services at an equal monthly rate of 175,000 tons. During the three months of its operation, viz., August, September and October, ~~the total~~ despatches to various deficit areas including the Defence Services amounted to 658,000 tons which exceeded the scheduled programme for three months by about 133,000 tons. The principal recipients of the quantities despatched were Bengal (219,600 tons), Bombay (75,400 tons), Madras (77,800 tons), Travancore|Cochin (45,900 tons) and Defence Services (192,500 tons). It was also anti-

pated that the surpluses declared for the purpose of the Plan were under-estimates and additional surpluses would be offered as time passed and this hope has also been borne out by subsequent offers. During the same period (August to October) additional surplus amounting to about 217,000 tons (rice 119,000, millets 29,000, wheat 37,000 and gram 32,000) have been received. The principal recipients are Bengal, Bombay, Travancore[Cochin, Madras, Deccan States and Defence Services.

The Foodgrains Policy Committee submitted its report which is now under consideration of the Government of India and the Food Conference in Session in New Delhi. The main elements of the plan recommended by the Foodgrains Policy Committee are as follows: The Basic Plan of allocation of surpluses as between different areas should be formulated by the Government of India and should be adjusted at specific intervals. The procurement of the quantities under the Plan or quantities required for domestic consumption should be the responsibility of the Provincial or State Governments which should set up efficient procurement agencies, enforce the Foodgrains Control Order rigorously and control the prices of foodgrains. The Provinces and States also should introduce rationing in all major cities having a population of 100,000 and over. The Government of India should supervise the operation of the Basic Plan, create an enforcement branch with a view to ensure the fulfilment of the quota programme and co-ordinate the policies generally. The foundation of the pattern of control advised by the Committee is the existence of a substantial food reserve built out of the imports from abroad under the control of the Government of India and large-scale imports for current consumption. The consensus of the Conference which was held at New Delhi (from October 13 to 16) was generally in favour of the recommendations of the Committee, which the Government of India have accepted.

5. The following observations are offered in regard to the various areas:—

*North-Western Region.*—The North-Western Region comprising of Punjab, Punjab States, N.-W.F.P., Kashmir, Sind and Baluchistan can be rightly called the granary of India. It is a large surplus block which can export on an average about a million and a half tons of foodgrains bulk of which consist of wheat, rice and millets. This block constitutes the agricultural Provinces of India. During 1942-43 Punjab and Sind were blessed with exceptionally good crops of wheat and rice. The Punjab, Punjab States (Bahawalpur, Khairpur and others), Sind and Baluchistan have offered very large surpluses for meeting the requirements of other areas. Sind has successfully established control over the prices of wheat, rice and other grains and has the distinction of having fulfilled all its quotas to the deficit areas. The quantities exported outside the Province are sold at the Punjab ruling market rates. The Punjab has more than fulfilled its rice and millets quota and the despatches of wheat including wheat products (based on permits issued) up to the end of October 1943, are about 490,000 tons (exclusive of despatches to Delhi), leaving a balance of 410,000

tons to be exported over the next 5 months, November to March.

*U.P. Region.*—U.P. is an all-grain-producing area. Normally, it has a large surplus in millets and wheat and a deficit in rice. The U.P. markets were greatly upset by the short-lived experiment to control prices and movement of foodgrains inaugurated early in the year and it was a long time before the markets recovered their equilibrium. In the initial months of the operation of the Basic Plan, U.P.'s policy was by and large dominated by the necessity of keeping conditions stable in its own industrial cities but subsequently the Province has despatched fairly large quantities of wheat and millets to other areas including Bengal. U.P. has a very large Reserve of wheat which is now being utilised to bring down the prices of wheat with a view to attain the normal wheat price-parity between Lyallpur and Hapur. The wheat prices in U.P. have registered a considerable decrease in recent weeks and it is anticipated that soon the normal price-parity will be restored.

*North-Eastern Region.*—The North-Eastern Region comprising of Assam, Bengal, Bihar, Orissa and Eastern States is the largest single rice-block of India. It produces about 16,000,000 tons out of 26,000,000 tons of the total rice crop of India. Assam, Eastern States and Orissa are surplus areas. Bihar and Bengal are deficit areas. During the current year, due to the failure of domestic rice crop as a result of cyclone and agricultural pests Bengal was faced with a shortage of about 2,000,000 tons in its rice supplies. This was, to some extent, offset by the carry-over from the previous season which had a record rice crop of 9,800,000 tons which left a net shortage of about 1,000,000 tons. Under the original Basic Plan Bengal has received up to the end of September 1943, over 400,000 tons of foodgrains from outside inclusive of the free trade receipts. The current rice crop is estimated at 8,890,000 tons which inclusive of the *Aus* crop will amount to about 10,900,000 tons which, if realized, is bound to prove an all-time record crop. It is too early yet to vouch for the accuracy of these figures but it is almost certain that Bengal will have a fairly good rice crop this year. According to the latest official estimate if Bengal could be supplied with 250,000 tons of foodgrains during the next three months, Bengal is expected to pull through the difficult situation prevailing at present in the Province. The Central Government are doing everything in their power to expedite the supplies as against a daily average rate of receipts of foodgrains on Bengal Government account of 1,000 tons per day, Bengal Government received foodgrains at the rate of over 3,300 tons per day during the month of September. The Central Government strongly hope that the surpluses within India and the quantities of foodgrains from abroad which are arriving into this country will enable them to more than fulfil the guarantee of the above quantities to Bengal.

In addition to this Bengal has been given a quota of 137,000 tons under the next kharif plan (November 1943 to October 1944) a part of which is likely to move into Bengal during the first three months. The scheme for rationing of the city of Calcutta will be soon complete and it is expected that Calcutta will be rationed from the 15th

of November. The Central Government are also alive to the necessity of improving the procurement machinery in Bengal with a view to mobilise the *aman* crop and necessary steps are under active examination. Assam expects a normal crop during this year and has repeated its offer of about 75,000 tons of rice surplus after fully providing for the requirements of its own population, the increased Army personnel and the quasi-military labour within its own territory. Bihar expects a fairly normal crop and without much assistance from outside Bihar can keep the situation under control. Orissa has a fairly normal crop this year and expects to supply 78,000 tons of rice during the current year. If the present crop estimates are realised and if the scheme of rationing for Calcutta and some of the urban areas in Bihar is put through quickly the situation will be brought within control.

*Bombay, C.P. and Hyderabad Region.*—Bombay is a heavily deficit area but by vigorous control measures Bombay has maintained the situation on an even keel. Bombay has received substantial quantities from outside. Under the Original Basic Plan Bombay received 276,000 tons up to the end of July 1943, and under the Revised Basic Plan Bombay has received 75,400 tons making a total of 351,400 tons, which compare favourably against Bombay's normal annual deficit of 700,000 tons. Central Provinces is a large surplus block in rice. Central Provinces has fulfilled its obligations under the Revised Basic Plan and is expected to offer and implement a fairly large surplus under the new kharif plan. The same remarks apply to Hyderabad although the programme of delivery of millets from Hyderabad to deficit areas has not been satisfactory. The Deccan States which are included in Bombay experienced very serious difficulties as they are adjacent to the famine districts of Bombay Presidency. The millets crop in the Deccan States in the current year is expected to be normal and with the assistance proposed it is hoped that the situation will be better than the previous year.

*Madras Region.*—This Region is heavily deficit. Normally Madras has a deficit to the extent of 500,000 tons in principal foodgrains while Travancore and Cochin had a deficit of 450,000 tons mainly in rice and wheat. In spite of its heavy deficit which was normally met by imports from Burma, Madras maintained the situation on an even keel by rigorous and strong measures of price control and efficient procurement machinery and even exported rice to Ceylon until May, 1943, when it was found necessary to discontinue all exports owing to the difficulties of the situation in the Province. The Madras Government have recently rationed the city of Madras and have extended the rationing scheme to nine other cities. The Madras food situation is comparatively better than most of the other areas, the prices are reasonable and people are satisfied with the functioning of the rationing scheme.

Travancore-Cochin has been the worst hit of the areas during the food crisis next to Bengal. These States depended for over 60 per cent. of their rice requirements on imports from Burma. Both the States of Travancore and Cochin have controlled prices and distribution of foodgrains within their territories and have rationed the urban

and even the rural areas. The Government of India have been fully alive to the position in Travancore and Cochin. Under the original Basic Plan a total quantity of 136,000 tons was despatched to Travancore|Cochin in four months—April to July—against their total 12-monthly quota of 480,000 tons. Under the Revised Basic Plan, in August and September, a total quantity of 32,000 tons has been despatched to Travancore|Cochin as against their quota of 90,000 tons. In addition to these quantities Madras has undertaken to supply to the Estates in Travancore|Cochin rice at the rate of 1,000 tons per month between August and November, 1943. The rice crop of Travancore and Cochin is being harvested at present and has brought some relief to the otherwise critical situation. The stock position and food position is relatively better in Travancore than in the State of Cochin. Travancore|Cochin have been given highest priority in the matter of distribution of surpluses for the new kharif plan. During the last three months, however, Cochin had been compelled to reduce full rice ration to its population of  $\frac{1}{2}$  lb. per day for three days of the week only giving other grains in the form of the ration on other days of the week.

*Rajputana and Central India States Region.*—The Central India and Rajputana States as a whole are a self-sufficient unit, and the food situation is on the whole satisfactory.

6. The areas where the food situation has caused considerable anxiety to the local administrations and the Government of India are Bengal, Travancore, Cochin, Ceded Districts of Madras, the famine districts of Bombay Presidency (Bijapur and Dharwar), the Deccan States and Balasor and Ganjam districts in Orissa. The position in Bengal has been very desperate and critical during the last three months. Death rate by starvation has been high and prices of rice in the black market have been such as to be beyond the reach of even the well-to-do classes. The Government of Bengal has, however, started a large number of relief centres, gruel kitchens and have also controlled the price of rice at Rs. 20 per maund. The immediate reaction to the statutory control over the prices has been the disappearance of stocks from the market in some centres but gradually supplies are re-emerging in the market as the determination of the Government to maintain the price control is becoming widely known. The position in the Bengal Districts, however, continues to be serious and amongst others, factors such as high prices, lack of adequate rice supplies and the difficulties of transporting foodgrains to various districts has greatly aggravated the situation. Plans are under way to directly send grains to the districts of Bengal from the Punjab. It will, however, take some time before the results of the measures now under consideration react on the prevailing situation. The situation in ~~Travancore~~ Travancore and Cochin has been relieved to some extent with the new crop. It is, however, clear that Travancore and Cochin will be faced with a comparatively difficult situation for the duration in view of the net shortage in the supply of rice which is the staple diet of the people of the States. The relatively better prospects of the millets crop in Bombay, Deccan States and Madras hold out the

promise that the situation will be comparatively better than that of last year. The main element of the situation is the absolute and imperative necessity of bringing and maintaining prices at a reasonable level throughout the country. This matter is under active consideration of the Provincial Governments and the Central Government.

Ever since the creation of the Food Department the position regarding the procurement of food supplies for the Army has not assumed any serious form. The question of supplying the food requirements of the quasi-military personnel engaged in important war-works in Bengal and in Madras has caused considerable difficulty. It has been suggested that their requirements should be met on the same basis as those of the Defence Services. Some provision has been made in the new kharif plan for meeting these requirements. But the total requirements of this type of labour are so large that the whole question is under further detailed examination.

If the situation in Bengal could be effectively brought within control and the policies recommended by the Foodgrains Policy Committee could be effectively implemented it will not be long before the food situation in the country could be brought within control although it will be yet a long way before it can be regarded as satisfactory.

**Normal surplus|deficit position of Bengal, Madras, Bombay and  
Travancore|Cochin.**

Province.	Commodity.	Normal quantity available.	Normal production.	Normal surplus (+) deficit (-) <sup>1</sup> position.
(In '000 tons).				
Bengal	Rice	8,866	6,802	-64
	Wheat	286	45	-241
	Millets	4	3	-1
	Gram	117	79	-38
Madras	Rice	4,903	4,581	-392
	Wheat	29	..	-29
	Millets	1,907	1,893	-14
	Gram	155	12	-143
Bombay	Rice	1,235	789	-444
	Wheat	545	310	-235
	Millets	1,667	1,313	-64
	Gram	158	91	-67
Travancore and Cochin	Rice	791	335	-456
	Wheat	13	..	-13
	Millets	..	..	..
	Gram	..	..	..

Statement showing the average wholesale prices of rice, wheat and millets at the following centres for the period September 1939 to August 1940, September 1940 to August 1941, September 1941 to August 1942, and September 1942 to August 1943.

com- modity.	Name of market.	Quality.	(In Rupees per maund)				Highest quoted.
			1939-40 (Sept to Aug)	1940-41 (Sept. to Aug)	1941-42 (Sept to Aug)	1942-43 (Sept. to Aug.)	
Rice	Calcutta	Kalma ordinary	Rs. a. p. 4 5 9	Rs. a. p. 5 8 0	Rs. a. p. 6 4 0	Rs a p 17 13 6	Rs a p 34 8 0 (Aug. '43)
	Patna	Red Sirinethi	3 11 10	4 10 10	5 9 0	11 14 0	26 0 0 (June & July '43)
Wheat	Lyalpur	White	3 0 11	3 7 4	4 10 0	8 7 8	10 9 0 (Aug. '43)
	Karachi	Punjab white	3 8 5	4 0 10	5 9 4	6 8 0	8 0 0 July '43
Jowar	Hyderabad	White 1st quality	4 1 4	3 11 8	3 14 0	5 15 6*	10 10 1 (May '43)
Bajra	Hyderabad	White, 1st quality	3 9 2	2 15 5	3 15 2	6 0 8*	8 10 6 (May '43)

\*Relates to September '42 to May '43.



## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF FOODGRAINS POLICY COMMITTEE

### CHAPTER 2.—STATISTICAL POSITION

1. The present position regarding agricultural statistics relating to production, distribution, export, consumption and stocks is most unsatisfactory. An improvement in the position is not only desirable but essential for the formulation of a successful food policy. We, therefore, recommend that the proposals for the improvement of agricultural statistics which are now before the Department of Education, Health and Lands should be implemented forthwith. In particular, the proposals for the improvement of the reporting agencies in the permanently-settled Provinces should be taken in hand with financial assistance from the Centre if necessary. In view, not only of the present crisis, but also of the world-wide situation, especially, which does not promise much improvement in the immediate post-war period, a more accurate determination of the statistical facts in relation to India's food supplies, is absolutely essential.

2. There is nothing in the internal situation in India to suggest that, apart from the cessation of imports from Burma and the vicissitudes of Nature—which affected Bengal adversely in 1942 and 1943, and have also influenced the Madras position, the *absolute volume* of supply has been impaired. But it is not doubtful that (a) the amount actually available out of the physical supply has decreased and (b) that demand, in relation to the availability of Supply, has increased.

3. The food crisis has been accentuated on the *Supply Side* (i) by the fact that certain normally deficit areas (Bombay and Malabar Coast) have been deprived of a disproportionately large part of their normal supplies by the cutting off of the Burma imports, (ii) by the reduction of normal supplies (and the destruction of stocks) in the normally surplus districts of Bengal due to the cyclone of October 1942, and by the widespread disease in the *aman* paddy crop of Western Bengal. It has been accentuated on the demand side by (i) the combination of an adverse supply situation in Bengal with an adverse psychological situation due to proximity to the war zone, (ii) a diminution in the relative magnitude of the marketable surplus through increased holding and/or increased consumption by the cultivator who in the depression period was probably eating less than was requisite for full efficiency, which reacts with disproportionate effect upon the urban consumers as a whole, (iii) probably some increase in *per capita* consumption by those in receipt, for the first time, of higher money incomes, (iv) a decline in the absolute size of the rice carry-over, (v) some withholding from sale of ~~available~~ stocks for "investment" and "black market" reasons, (vi) an increased demand, which could not always be satisfied and therefore exerted in altogether disproportionate influence on prices, for personal and family "security" reasons.

4. The absolute rise of food prices does not measure the absolute decline in the volume of available supply, since it is a long established fact that food prices rise disproportionately to decline in supply.

5. Imports of foodgrains act as a safety valve in years of bad harvest and as such play an important role in relieving the food situation by mitigating anxiety. The absence of imports reacts adversely on the food situation as a whole (apart from the effect in certain specific areas) quite disproportionately to the actual magnitude of imports.

6. A reduction in the marketable surplus may be disproportionate to actual changes in physical supply, and in its turn has a disproportionate effect on urban supplies.

7. The administrative problem does not alone consist in "marrying" surpluses and deficits in particular foodgrains. This is not possible, and it will only be possible to master the situation by large-scale substitution, in the habitual dietary of the population, of one foodgrain for another.

#### CHAPTER 3.—'GROW MORE FOOD' CAMPAIGN

8. Government should encourage the large-scale distribution of improved seed.

9. Steps should be taken by Government to promote the production of compost from night-soil and town-refuse.

10. Assistance should be afforded to industrialists for the importation of plant and in all other ways such as the giving of technical advice for the manufacture of Ammonium Sulphate to the extent of at least 350,000 tons a year.

11. The Government of India should urge upon the Provinces and States to promote with all energy and expedition such irrigation and drainage schemes as promise quick results.

12. It is imperatively necessary to prevent depletion of India's serviceable milch and draught cattle by the vigorous enforcement of the prohibitions recommended by the Central Food Advisory Council.

13. The appropriate Department of the Government of India should secure an adequate quota of iron and steel, required for the replacement and repair of worn-out or defective agricultural implements.

14. The Committee welcomes the assurance recently given by the Government of India that action has been initiated in regard to the importation of tractors and other agricultural implements and their parts.

15. Facilities should be afforded to agriculturists to enable them to secure the fuel and lubricating oil required by them.

16. No further delay should take place in the issue of the rules giving the necessary powers to Provincial Governments to regulate crop production and to compel the cultivation of culturable waste lands.

17. We welcome the resolution of the Government of Assam dated the 24th August 1943, by which improved provision is made for

the process of land settlement in various districts. We hope that the process of land settlement for which provision is made in the aforesaid Resolution, will, as far as possible, be accelerated.

18. The present restrictions laid on the milling of rice in Madras in regard to under-polishing should be extended to other rice Provinces.

19. The relevant Department of the Government should take the necessary steps to assist rice mills to obtain sufficient supplies of mill stores.

20. Provincial and State Governments should take steps to increase the strength of their Departments of Agriculture.

21. Schemes of research, especially those which have a bearing upon the immediate short-range problems of food production, should be adequately endowed.

#### CHAPTER 4.—IMPORTS AND EXPORTS

22. India must cease, for the duration of the war, to be a net exporter of food: no exports should be permitted unless such exports are fully compensated by imports in addition to the imports mentioned in the succeeding paragraph. No exports of rice should be permitted at all. The Food Department must be completely satisfied that such compensatory arrangements are entirely adequate. In no other way will it be possible to stop the crop of rumours which have exercised a dangerous effect on the country.

23. As regards imports, the Government of India should (a) press for imports to create a Central Food Grains Reserve, which should not be less than 500,000 tons. Such a quantity is absolutely necessary to prevent a breakdown of the machinery of the procurement, rationing and price policies outlined in subsequent chapters. It is not a substitute for but a complement to more vigorous administrative action in other fields. (b) Press the United Nations to arrange for imports for current consumption until further notice, equal in amount per annum to the average annual net imports of the last five years or about one million tons. This request is strongly urged on two grounds:—

- (i) the fact that the area most likely to be involved in military operations is also the area most hard-pressed as regards food supplies, and
  - (ii) that owing to the low *per capita* standards of consumption generally prevailing in India as a whole, the degree to which subsistence levels can be cut is considerably less than in more fortunately situated countries.
- (c) investigate the impact on the food situation in India of the strategical plans now being elaborated, in so far as they concern the presence of large Overseas Forces in India.

24. Whatever arrangements or agreements are entered into, should be most scrupulously observed, in order to minimize the dangers of misinterpretation and rumour-mongering.

## CHAPTER 5.—ARMY PURCHASE

25. The global figure for the Army's requirements of foodgrains is 650,000 tons of which 500,000 tons is wheat and wheat products and 150,000 tons is rice. Thus the pressure of Army demands falls relatively lightly on the foodgrains which is most in current deficit. In so far as the Indian Army is concerned, the demand for foodgrains is not a net addition to the total demand, except to the extent that *per capita* consumption in the Army exceeds that which would have taken place if the soldiers had remained civilians. Supplies of foodgrains to Overseas troops serving in India is included in this figure.

26. An expansion of the Indian Army would, of course, involve an expansion in the Army's demands for foodgrains, which would, however—except in so far as *per capita* consumption was in excess of civilian consumption of the same men—be offset by a decline in civilian consumption.

27. The global figure alluded to includes exports to troops in the field Overseas.

28. The figures of authorized reserve stocks are below those currently quoted, and the actual reserves are below the authorized reserves.

29. We are satisfied that exaggerated importance has been attached to wastage of supplies.

30. We desire to draw the attention of the military authorities, as well as the Food Department, to the direct and indirect effect upon available food supply and upon prices of additional demands which may be involved in the strategical discussions now proceeding.

## CHAPTER 6.—PROCUREMENT

31. Under existing conditions of scarcity (and in certain areas, of semi-panic) the procurement problem cannot be solved by a resort to "Free Trade." The restoration of the unlimited right to buy and sell, by any one at any price to any one at any price, in any part of India would not produce satisfactory results.

32. The procurement problem is not primarily an issue of moving supplies from surplus Provinces to deficit Provinces but of acquiring from the cultivator the maximum amount to be obtained from every part of India.

33. From the standpoint of principle the only completely satisfactory solution would be a Central Government Foodgrains Monopoly. But the problems of staffing, organization and administration involved are so great and the needs of the situation so pressing, that the necessary time is lacking.

34. On the other hand the institution of a Central Foodgrains Reserve appears to us indispensable. It should not be less than 500,000 tons. This reserve should, in the first instance, be built up by imports and the Government of India should exhaust every effort to secure the quantity of imports mentioned above. This Reserve should be held entirely separate from the imports which we have recom-

mended should be obtained for current consumption and should be devoted exclusively to the purpose for which it was intended.

35. In order to avoid unnecessary competition, the Centre should entrust its physical procurement operations to the agencies set up by the Provinces and States, (including acquirements for Essential Services and Essential Industries), subject to the right of the Centre, if the procurement agency proves unsatisfactory, to insist upon remedial measures being introduced. On this and other grounds, we recommend the establishment, within the Food Department, of an Enforcement Branch.

36. The organization and efficiency of the grains trade varies in different parts of the country and the extent to which different Provinces and States can make use of trading agencies must therefore vary with the local circumstances.

37. The general objective of all procurement machinery must be to eliminate competitive buying to the greatest practicable extent. This can most easily be achieved by either confining a particular buyer to a particular area, or if the unit of purchase is to be the entire Province or State, using a single buying firm or a syndicate of firms, or a single official buyer.

38. In considering the elimination of competitive buying, the possibility of using transport facilities to ensure priority for official procurement as against buyers on their own account, and as a means of controlling competition, has not received the general attention which it deserves. With the advent of urban rationing, control of transport as an element in procurement machinery will be of increasing importance.

39. It is not possible to have a perfectly uniform pattern of procurement machinery in every part of India. The Food Department should study the whole position in order to determine which on balance, is the most suitable machinery for recommendation in a particular region. Although the general creation of Provincial or State monopolies would be premature, it should be the subject of study by the Food Department.

40. Occasional requisitioning from the trade in connection with price control or anti-hoarding drive is legitimate, but in so far as requisitioning involves taking over cultivator's stocks, occasional requisitioning should only be resorted to with extreme caution and not until late in the crop year, at least not until the sowings of the next crop of that grain are completed.

41. Regular requisitioning as part of a general policy of official procurement should not at present be resorted to generally, for the ground requires careful preparation, but we believe that in seriously deficit areas, an approximation to this practice may prove necessary. If it does, it is better to face the situation ~~than~~ embark on hasty experiments without adequate preparation.

42. In considering the problem of increasing supplies of consumers' goods to the cultivator, we reject, as not in the interest of Indian economy as a whole, any schemes for the direct barter of

foodgrains against civil supplies though we see no objection to the organization of co-operative societies prepared to buy grains from the cultivator and at the same time making consumers' goods available to him. We desire to emphasize the absolute necessity of making available to the grower as great a volume of consumers' goods as possible after taking cognizance of urgent military requirements. Besides piecegoods, we refer to iron and steel timber, building materials, cement, drugs, agricultural implements, leather goods, metal utensils, etc. Side by side with all possible efforts to make those available to the grower, if a demand for the precious metals continues to manifest itself, we are satisfied that it would be advisable for the Government of India to secure silver and gold for sale to the cultivator in order to procure the maximum quantity of grain from him.

In view of the impending military operations on the Eastern frontier of India, it would appear to be in the best interests of the United Nations to ensure the maximum supply of foodgrains in this country. We cannot over-stress the desirability of avoiding resort to compulsory acquisition under existing circumstances by maximizing the inducements which can be held out to the cultivator.

#### CHAPTER 7.—DISTRIBUTION AND CONSUMPTION

43. Distribution of foodgrains in India cannot be considered solely in the light of urban requirements. There are various classes of the rural population who are not in a position to sustain themselves fully throughout the crop-year. Further, there are mining and other industrial enterprises carried on in rural areas, which require attention. Nevertheless, it remains the case that urban areas are in the main 100 per cent. deficit areas.

44. We have examined the transport situation. Procurement has in certain cases been interfered with because of wagons shortage; on the other hand the Railway authorities complain that in certain cases supplies of foodgrains have lagged behind wagon supply. It is clear to us that an officer in charge of Movements is required in the Food Department.

45. We recommend that a complete control of, and co-ordination over, coastal shipping be secured as soon as possible and that control be centralized in one department only of the Government of India.

Also, that the organization of country craft be carried to the stage at least where priority of movement of foodgrains can be secured.

Also that river and canal traffic in so far as the transport of foodgrains is concerned be properly organized.

Also, that more use should be made of road transport.

46. The general case for urban rationing is overwhelming and it is the view of the Committee (which has already been communicated to the Government) that rationing should be introduced forthwith in the larger cities of India, both in deficit and surplus areas, in the first instance in those with populations of one lakh and over and should be progressively extended. The Committee is unanimously of opinion that apart from any temporary breakdown, the standard ration of

cereals per adult per day should not be allowed to fall below 1 lb. If in spite of the Grow More Food Campaign and improved procurement machinery, the available supply in India is insufficient to guarantee this ration, imports must be made available. Due attention must be paid to securing adequate quality.

47. It is essential that Provinces and States should at once take in hand the selection and training of the necessary officers. In the first instance these officers who will be put in executive control should be deputed to Bombay for study, but it will be necessary for the Central Government to set up a Central Training School as the number of officers required increases. The preliminary steps necessary should be taken forthwith.

48. Such rationing should extend to all classes and sections of the population and should cover all major foodgrains in general use in the particular areas concerned.

49. It is desirable that, as far as possible, the tastes and habits of the various communities should be respected (including the provision of wheat in place of atta or flour), but no guarantee can or should be given to any section of the community that its habitual foodgrains will be forthcoming in the usual quantities.

50. Rationing will be extremely difficult unless adequate procurement machinery is available to guarantee supplies. All provinces must be instructed and all States must be requested to review their existing machinery in the light of the magnitude of the task implied in the extension of rationing.

51. It is possible that the announcement of the introduction of rationing will lead to an attempt to forestall by the accumulation of reserves by individuals. Provinces and States must counter any such attempt by vigorous and drastic enforcement of anti-hoarding measures and by control of movements into cities.

52. There should be no attempt at harassment or persecution of individuals for minor breaches of the law. Nevertheless, concerted attempts on the part of individuals to evade or circumvent a rationing scheme, that is, to throw upon others an undue share of the sacrifices which all should bear equally, merit and should receive drastic and exemplary punishment, without regard to any consideration other than the necessity of seeing that the law is observed. It will be necessary for Provinces and States to pay due and urgent regard to the problem of enforcement. Enforcement is likely to be most difficult in the earlier stages and the provision of enforcement machinery must therefore form an integral part of the administrative apparatus from the very commencement. Such enforcement machinery should not form part of the ordinary police service.

53. It is essential that large-scale public ~~publics~~ should be undertaken so as to prepare the public and to enable it to co-operate willingly with the rationing authorities in achieving complete success.

54. It is essential that the Provincial and State authorities should set up Advisory Bureaux to which the public can turn for detailed guidance and advice, and that the Rationing Authorities should seek

the positive assistance of public-spirited citizens by setting up non-official Advisory Committees.

55. When rationing is introduced, it will probably be desirable in the large cities to issue individual rather than family ration cards. Registration with a defined retailer is indispensable.

56. Every effort should be made to make use of the normal machinery of retail trade, but any attempt at sabotage should be met by the withdrawal of the retailer's licence together with black-listing and publicity. In order to act as a check upon the retail trade, Government should be responsible for a certain number of distribution centres, the number of which should be increased, if adequate retail establishments in private hands are not available, to avoid unnecessary drain upon the time of the consumer.

57. The system by which employers, associations or individual employers have distributed foodgrains to their employees should be assimilated to the general rationing scheme, in the sense that the beneficiaries under such schemes should be treated in all essential respects in the same way as members of the general public.

58. Every encouragement should be afforded to secure the distribution through consumers Co-operative Societies, subject to the principle that the members of such Societies should be treated in all essential respects in the same way as members of the general public.

59. The greatest possible degree of uniformity should obtain all over India as regards the details of regulations, the size and shape of ration cards, the forms to be filled up by the public and other such matters which greatly affect the day-to-day ease with which rationing can be worked.

60. There are various ancillary matters relative to rationing which we desire the Food Department to study:—

(a) The individual rationing of sugar and of milk.

(b) The creation of "alleviative" agencies in the way of Government-run cooked foodshops and of industrial canteens.

(c) The position arising from the habit of certain sections of community in taking one or more meals at eating-houses, restaurants, etc.

(d) The Food Department should consider the possibility of improving the nutritional position when rationing is introduced by making supplies of groundnuts available to the rationed population.

61. We desire the Food Department to consult the expert nutritional authorities from time to time on the implications of the policies it is proposed to implement.

62. There is decided room in India for austerity in consumption of all foods on the part of more favourably-situated members of all communities, and, before legislation is initiated, we desire to appeal to the public morale and conscience of all concerned.

63. As regards rural areas—



- (a) general rationing is not possible,
- (b) industries employing organized labour situate therein should employ the normal procurement machinery, whether the area is surplus or deficit,
- (c) in deficit areas Government distribution and informal, if not formal, rationing may be necessary, if the general situation is tight and the absolute deficit in such area is large, and
- (d) in famine or semi-famine areas Government action is absolutely imperative.

#### CHAPTER 8.—PRICES

64. So long as control in any form is exercised over the processes of acquisition, distribution and consumption, it is inevitable that prices should be affected. Thus, whether statutory price control is instituted or not, prices ruling in the various markets today are the combined effect of the forces of supply and demand and the administrative influences which are brought to bear.

65. So long as control follows the political demarcations set by the existence of Provinces and States, it is inevitable that unless there is a deliberate attempt at co-ordination, prices in different parts of India will not differ merely by the cost of transport from producing to consuming area. It is desirable that the differences now existing should be narrowed.

66. As a step in this direction it is desirable that the system of pooled prices for imports should as far as possible be reintroduced.

67. The general level of prices in some of the deficit areas is now so high as to impose a serious strain on the poorer sections of the population. It is, therefore, desirable that the process of levelling should take the form of reducing these prices rather than of raising prices in the more fortunately situated Provinces. This involves not only the procurement of supplies at the lowest possible prices in the surplus areas of those Provinces where prices are high, the importation of the maximum quantities which can be secured from surplus Provinces and overseas, but also that procurement, rationing and anti-hoarding measures in all areas should be keyed up.

68. The position in Bengal is at present so abnormal that it must be subjected to special rescue operations. No attempt can or should be made to co-ordinate prices in adjacent areas to Bengal prices. Once prices in Bengal have been brought to a more reasonable level, the question of a regional price for rice in Eastern India should be reopened.

69. Although complete unanimity has not been reached, the overwhelming majority of the Committee is ~~very strongly of the opinion~~ that statutory price control should be instituted for all (major) food-grains in all provinces, and also similar control of an increasing number of non-agricultural commodities, particularly those necessary to the cultivator, should be undertaken.

70. It is the opinion of the Committee that the minimum conditions precedent to the establishment of statutory price control are (1) ad-

quate procurement machinery, (b) rigorous and drastic enforcement of the Foodgrains Control Order and of Anti-Hoarding measures and (c) effective control over transport. To attain the maximum chance of success, statutory price control requires the existence of a Central and also of Provincial and State reserves.

71. Statutory prices should not be fixed without the consent of the Central Government. The Centre should have the right to suggest changes of prices both upwards and downwards.

✓72. A small standing prices committee representative of the Centre, the Provinces and States, producers and the trade should be set up at the Centre which should meet at regular intervals to consider the price position. All disputes relating to price changes which may arise between the Provinces and States and the Central Government should be referred to this Standing Committee.

73. In considering the level of prices of foodgrains appropriate to a particular area regard should be had to (a) the cost of articles entering into the cultivator's cost of production; (b) cost of articles entering into his standard of life, and (c) cost of cultivation of marginal lands.

74. Pending the enforcement of statutory control on prices throughout India, such Provinces as desire to enforce statutory control or ceiling prices should be permitted to do so subject to the approval of the statutory or ceiling price by the Central Government.

75. The Committee has taken cognizance of the various measures now being actively pursued by the Government of India to combat inflationary tendencies. While recognizing that the stabilization of the level of food prices is itself a powerful anti-inflationary measure owing to the close relation between rising food prices and the rise of other prices, nevertheless the Committee feels that the more vigorously anti-inflationary measures generally are pursued, the easier it will be to combat the evil of rising prices of food.

76. The policy of selling foodgrains at reduced or preferential prices is no substitute for a policy of rationing and may even have unfavourable indirect consequences on the price-level. Such a policy should never be made a substitute for an integrated foodgrains policy.

#### CHAPTER 9.—THE "BASIC PLAN"

77. The Basic Plan is concerned with that aspect of the general problem of enforcement which involves a determination, first, of the magnitude of the aggregate surplus of foodgrains available in certain Provinces and States and second with the magnitude of the aggregate deficit of foodgrains in the Provinces and States, and with the assistance which surplus areas can give to deficit areas. Since production naturally varies from time to time, no "failure" of the Basic Plan is involved in a readjustment of the figures from time to time. Such readjustment is, indeed, absolutely necessary.

✓78. In the view of the Committee, there should, within any one calendar year, be two dates at which stock should be taken of the situation. The first of these dates should be in the month of April, the other in the month of November. The figures of the Basic Plan should

be kept continuously under review in the intervening period with the object of securing as accurate a picture as possible at the beginning of each accounting period.

79. In view of the known defects of the statistical information available, the figures of production, stocks, surpluses and deficits must contain a large element of conjecture. This situation cannot be remedied by a mere change of formula. Provided that all the Provinces use a uniform procedure, it is probable that any formula which takes account of the more fundamental facts will range the Provinces in the same order, as regards the magnitude of their deficits. Even if all Provinces overstate their deficits to the same extent, this will result only in an exaggeration of the absolute figures, but probably not of the relative position of each as compared with the others.

80. In place of the formula hitherto employed, the Committee recommends that the following formula be adopted: Normal consumption requirements should be taken as the average of the estimated harvests of all the foodgrains over a five-year period ending 31st March 1942 plus|minus the average imports|exports of the same period. Surpluses and deficits should be calculated on the basis of normal consumption thus determined compared with the estimates of the forthcoming year's|half year's production of all foodgrains. But the study of more appropriate formula should be continuously undertaken by the Food Department. No formula should be employed which is not capable of extension, to any part of India.

81. It is impossible under Indian conditions to achieve a complete equality of sacrifice between the urban and rural population or between one portion of the country and another: the objective must be to reduce existing inequalities to the greatest practicable extent. This implies that it is not desirable, when allocating amounts to deficit Provinces, that each Province should be entitled to reduce its deficit by an equal percentage amount. Provinces which show the highest percentage deficit (subject, of course, to adequate scrutiny) must receive priority until their deficit is brought nearer (in percentage amount) to the average all-India figure.

#### CHAPTER 10.—FOOD DEPARTMENT

82. The existing division of the Food Department into a Secretariat Branch and a Directorate General of Food Branch no longer corresponds to the necessities of the situation. If the recommendations of this report are accepted, the main work of the Food Department in future will not be physical procurement but continuous supervision of the Basic Plan, Enforcement (i.e., supervision of the procurement and rationing operations of the Provinces, including the operation of the Foodgrains Control Order), Intelligence and Statistics, Movements, Publicity and General Food Policy. The committee is of opinion that team-work of the highest order will be necessary. In order to ensure continuous and conscious co-ordination, the Committee recommend that the high officials of the Department in charge of these functions should operate as a Food Board, with the Secretary as Chairman, meeting daily as a matter of routine and with such additional *ad hoc* meetings as may prove necessary.

83. Every effort should be made to recruit experts of high standing from the grain trades for services in those posts (particularly Enforcement and Intelligence) where intimate and detailed knowledge of conditions in various parts of India is of great moment.

84. In addition to the Advisory Committee on Prices there should be an Expert Panel, of not more than six, drawn from the trade, whose advice should be sought on appropriate occasions. The expert members of the Advisory Committee on Prices should be asked to serve also as members of this Panel.

#### CHAPTER 11.—GENERAL ADMINISTRATIVE ASPECTS OF THE FOOD PROBLEM

85. The work of Food Administration calls for a full-time staff, adequate in numbers, properly trained and adequately disciplined. On the other hand, no staff can function adequately unless backed by the full force of public opinion, which should encourage and support every move against those anti-social persons who threaten their food supplies. The fullest use should be made of advisory bodies, but the Food Administration itself must be autonomous.

86. The Food Department should consider the issue, at the earliest possible date, of a Food Administration Manual and should issue Supplements thereto at regular intervals.

87. The Foodgrains Control Order, concerned as it is with the movement of supplies through trade channels and with the disposition of stocks from time to time, is an indispensable part of the machinery of Food Administration. It requires to be drastically and effectively enforced, and unnecessary delays in the receipt of information, its collation and utilization, both by the Provinces and States and the Food Department must be avoided at all costs. The Order should be so amended as to deal separately with (a) traders, (b) cultivators and (c) consumers' stocks.

88. The system of Regional Food Commissionerships should be continued, and if necessary, the number of Commissioners should be increased. Commissioners should possess the confidence of the local community and be familiar with local conditions. They should be expected to tour extensively and to prepare themselves to place the views of the Provinces and States in their areas effectively before the Centre, as well as to place the views of the Centre before the authorities in their areas. To this end they should be expected to pay personal visits to the Food Department from time to time.

#### CHAPTER 12.—THE RELATIONS BETWEEN THE PROVINCES AND STATES AND THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT IN MATTERS RELATING TO FOOD

89. The various Provinces of India are so inter-related in food matters, that "give and take" physically and administratively, is imperative.

90. Public opinion will not tolerate a "hands-off" attitude by the Centre, and, in consequence, the Centre cannot accept any situation which would involve its having responsibility without powers.

91. Co-operation can best be secured by clearly defined spheres of authority and clearly defined methods of procedure. In particular, as regards the Basic Plan:—

(a) If after full discussion there is still difference of opinion between the Centre and the Provinces, the decision of an expert arbitration committee shall be accepted as final by both the Centre and the Provinces. A similar arbitral procedure should be adopted in the case of the States though the composition of the Tribunal might have to be different.

(b) The Provinces must be prepared to accept:—

(I) The allocation proposed by the Centre. In making the allocations, the Centre shall have regard to the reasonable requirements of each deficit unit.

(II) The undisputed management by the Centre of the Central Foodgrains Reserve.

(III) Any conditions laid down for rescue or special assistance operations.

92. Disputes arising out of the details of administration must, in the last resort, be settled by the Centre. Disputes of a wider character involve issues which make it impossible for their final adjudication to be in the hands of the Food Department.

93. The constitutional position as regards the States differs from that of the Provinces, and whilst the highest degree of co-operation is obviously called for, the normal channels of intercourse must be relied upon to resolve any difficulties that may arise.

## RELIEF FUNDS

The cry of distress from Bengal, Orissa, Malabar and Andhra met with generous response from all parts of the country. We give here the receipts and disbursements of some of the funds raised. They are only representative and not exhaustive.

The *Hindustan Times* and *Hindustan* started a Relief Fund on Sept. 4 1943, for the relief of the distressed in the famine areas of Bengal, Orissa, Rajputana, Royalaseema and Malabar. The Fund, which had originally been proposed to be open for three weeks, was formally closed on the twenty-fifth day (September 28). From the opening day the call of the suffering evoked spontaneous and generous response throughout; collections came in a magnificent flow from Delhi and outstations, and the formal closing day recorded the total collection of Rs. 3,21,430-3-0. Since the closing date contributions have continued to trickle in, the amount received up to December 10 being over Rs. 41,000.



*The Hindustan Times*, 14-11-1943.

## THE "HINDUSTAN TIMES" and "HINDÜSTAN" RELIEF FUND

	Dr. Rs. A. P.	Cr. Rs. A. P.
By collections received up to December 10, 1943 .. .. .		3,63,323 9 3
To Seva Sangh, Contai, (through Sjt. A. V. Thakkar) .. ..	2,451 11 0	
„ Secretary, Bengal Relief Committee, Calcutta .. .. .	21,012 0 0	
„ Orissa Relief Committee .. .	6,673 0 0	
„ Ajmer, Mewar and Rajputana Relief (through Sjt. A. V. Thakkar)	10,100 0 0	
„ Malabar Relief (Rs. 8,000 through Sjt. A. V. Thakkar and Rs. 3,000 through Sjt. C. Rajagopalachari)	11,000 0 0	
„ Royalaseema Relief (through Sjt. A. V. Thakkar) .. .. .	5,000 0 0	
„ All-India Women's Conference Relief Centre (Rs. 2,500 through Shrimati Renuka Ray and Rs. 2,000 through Shrimati Rajen Nehru) ..	4,500 0 0	
„ Friends Ambulance Unit (through Mr Richard Symonds) .. ..	20,000 0 0	
„ All-India Women's Reserve Medical Unit (through Dr Mrs Chaudhuri)	1,000 0 0	
„ Seva Samity, Allahabad for relief in Burdwan (through Dr Hriday Nath Kunzru) .. .. .	10,000 0 0	
„ All-Bengal Flood and Famine Relief Committee (through Mr G. L. Mehta) .. .. .	10,000 0 0	
President Servants of India Society, for relief in Bengal .. ..	10,000 0 0	
Wheat (to Bengal) 483 tons costing	1,50,442 8 3	
Rice ( „ ) 100 tons costing ..	46,113 5 6	
Balance (in cash) ..	55,031 0 6	
<b>Total .. .. .</b>	<b>3,63,323 9 3</b>	<b>3,63,323 9</b>

*Note:* A sum of Rs. 50,000 received from the *Indian Express* Relief Fund was sent separately to the Secretary, Bengal Relief Committee, Calcutta.

## RELIEF FUNDS

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**"JANMABHOOMI" (Bombay) FUND**

	Dr.			Cr.		
	Rs	As	P.	Rs.	As.	P.
By collections received up to December 6, 1943 .. .. .				4,65,225	6	5
To Sjt. G. L. Mehta .. .. .	72,000	0	0			
" Dr. Syama Prasad Mookherjee ..	50,000	0	0			
" Sri Ramakrishna Ashram ..	65,000	0	0			
" Harnath Society .. .	700	0	0			
" Jain Sangh Society .. ..	5,500	0	0			
" Seva Samiti through Dr. Hirday Nath Kunzru .. .. .	10,000	0	0			
Orissa through Sjt. A. V. Thakkar	20,000	0	0			
Malabar through Sjt. A. V. Thakkar	10,000	0	0			
Andhra through Sjt. Konda Venkatappayya .. ..	10,000	0	0			
purchase of nearly 50,000 mds. of bajra for Bengal, including Rs. 4,600 being transport expenses	1,62,101	0	0			
" purchase of cloth for Bengal, Orissa and Andhra, including Rs. 52 expenses .. .	16,077	0	0			
" incidental expenses .. ..	305	13	0			
Balance .. .. .	43,541	9	5			
Total	4,65,225	6	5	4,65,225	6	5

**THE "INDIAN EXPRESS" (Madras) Fund**

By collections received up to December 6, 1943 .. .. .				1,72,000	0	0
To Dr. Syama Prasad Mookherjee ..	1,00,000	0	0			
" Bengal Relief Committee through the <i>Hindustan Times</i> , New Delhi	50,000	0	0			
" Sjt. Konda Venkatappayya for Royalaseema Relief .. ..	5,000	0	0			
" Sjt. V. R. Nayanar, Calicut, Malabar .. .. .	5,000	0	0			
Balance .. .. .	12,000	0	0			
Total	1,72,000	0	0	1,72,000	0	0

**THE "LEADER" (Allahabad) FUND**

By collections received up to December 7, 1943 .. .. .				1,23,440	13	1
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	Rs	As.	P.	Rs.	As.	P.
To Bengal Relief Committee	99,296	0	0			
Marwari Relief Committee	3,234	0	0			
All-India Seva Samiti .	4,574	3	0			
Balance .. .	16,336	10	1			
Total	1,23,440	13	1	1,23,440	13	1

*. THE "INDIAN NATION" (Fatna) FUND*

By collections received up to December 8, 1943 .. .. .				56,224	5	9
To Bengal Relief Committee, Calcutta	20,000	0	0			
" Balance .. .. .	26,224	5	9			
Total	56,224	5	9	56,224		

*THE "TEJ" (Delhi) FUND*

By collections received up to December 8, 1943 .. .. .				26,543	2	0
To Dr. Syama Prasad Mookherjee, President, Bengal Relief Committee	20,000	0	0			
" Secretary, Orissa Merchants' Relief Committee .. .. .	6,543	2	0			
Total	26,543	2	0	26,543	2	0

*. THE "AJ" (Benares) FUND*

By collections received up to December 6, 1943 .. .. .				25,500	0	0
To Dr. Syama Prasad Mookherjee, President, Bengal Relief Committee	10,000	0	0			
" Sjt. G. L. Mehta for All-Bengal Relief Committee .. .. .	4,000	0	0			
" Purchase of foodgrains to Bengal Relief Committee .. .. .	10,000	0	0			
" Balance .. .. .	1,500	0	0			
Total	25,500	0	0	25,500	0	0

## THE "VANDEMATARAM" (Bombay) FUND

By collections received up to November 30, 1943				3,56,357 12 9
To purchase of cloth for Bengal	..	..	..	28,000 0 0
" purchase of rice	.	..	..	52,000 0 0
" Gujrat Relief Comr ee, Calcutta	50,000	0	0	
" Sjt. Gaganvihari M., Calcutta	20,000	0	0	
" Marwari Relief Cor ttee, Calcutta	10,000	0	0	
" Sm. Saudamini ] ta, Calcutta (for milk distribution)	2,000	0	0	
" Ramakrishna Mission (for purchase of rice)	10,000	0	0	
" Dr Hirday Nath, Kunzru, Allahabad (for Midnapore relief)	10,000	0	0	
" Sjt. V. R. Nainar, Calicut (for orphanages)	10,000	0	0	
" President, Royalaseema Relief Fund	15,000	0	0	
" Orissa Relief	10,000	0	0	
Balance	1,39,357	12	9	
				<hr/>
				3,56,357 12 9 3,56,357 12 9

